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Ruth D. Greene

BLANCHETTE AND THE ESCAPE · TWO PLAYS BY BRIEUX · WITH PREFACE BY H. L. MENCKEN · TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY FREDERICK EISEMANN

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By L. E. Bassett

PREFACE
BY H. L. MENCKEN

PREFACE

"After the death of Ibsen," says George Bernard Shaw, in his preface to the first English translation of Brieux's plays, "Brieux confronted Europe as the most important dramatist west of Russia. In that kind of comedy which is so true to life that we have to call it tragi-comedy, and which is not only an entertainment but a history and a criticism of contemporary morals, he is incomparably the greatest writer France has produced since Molière."

A somewhat extravagant statement, perhaps — who, indeed, looks for restraint and niceness in a Shavian preface? — but still one with a certain unmistakable flavor of truth in it. All the acknowledged giants of the French drama since Molière have been giants of dramaturgy rather than giants of truth. Working in series from Beaumarchais to Sardou, with Scribe as the master of them all, they have brought the form of the stage play very close to perfection, but they have not added much that is of consequence to its content. Even the younger Dumas, for all his famous revolt against the snarled conventions of

classicism and romanticism, did no more than set up a new convention in place of the old ones. The drama of ideas that he preached quickly became, in the hands of Augier, Coppèe and Feuillet, a drama of one idea only. Its sole problem was that of the woman taken in adultery. In some of these variations upon "La Dame aux Camélias," the successors to Marguerite Gautier were defended and in some they were excoriated, in some they were married and in some they were not, but the struggle depicted in every one was that between such a woman and the moral forces of society. The result was an inelastic and monotonous type of play, with the so-called drama of the triangle as its highest development. After a while, indeed, the word "eternal" came to be inserted before "triangle," as if this single situation were immutable and inevitable, and the only proper concern of a serious dramatist. Between the early 60's and the early 90's, France produced scarcely half a dozen first-rate plays in which adultery was not the leading motive. Even Brieux, as we shall see, was forced to yield something to the prevailing fashion when he began.

There were plenty of Frenchmen, of course, who saw that this tedious sounding of one note

was not realism in any true sense, despite its obvious superiority to the childish romanticism that had gone before it. One of them was Émile Zola, and throughout the 70's he maintained a vigorous war for what he called naturalism on the stage — that is, for an accurate and unsentimental representation of human life as it really was, with the stress laid unequally upon no one of its elements. But Zola, though a novelist of the first genius, had very little skill at playmaking, and the failure of his experiments worked serious damage to his theory. By one of the curious coincidences of literary history, the collapse of his propaganda came at the very moment another and far greater dramatist was converted to it. The convert was Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian, whose first social drama, "A Doll's House," was given to the world in the last days of 1879. Ibsen was not long in conquering Germany and his native Scandinavia, but in France, as in England and the United States, he made so little impression that he remained almost unknown for ten years. By the time "A Doll's House" got to Paris, indeed, a blow for the new naturalism had been already struck by one of Zola's countrymen. This rebel was Eugène Brieux.

His "Blanchette" was done at the Théâtre Libre on February 2, 1892. It was not until more than two years later — to be exact, on April 20, 1894, — that "A Doll's House" was presented at the Vaudeville by Mme. Rejane.

Just how much Brieux owes to Zola and to Ibsen it is not easy to determine with certainty, for his personal reticence is such that he has told us very little about his intellectual history, and the only forerunner he has openly praised is Augier. But it must be plain that he felt the influence of both men during his formative period, if only indirectly, for in the earliest of his serious plays one finds both the laborious accuracy of the one and the penetrating iconoclasm of the other. "Blanchette," in truth, might pass muster as an experimental work by either of them. The picture of the Rousset home in the first and second acts is thoroughly Zolaesque in its piling up of small details, and the attack upon popular education is made by the elaborate *reductio ad absurdum* which Ibsen employed so often and so devastatingly. And in the plays following, we find Brieux making a more and more effective use of the same methods and materials. Bit by bit he moves away from the orthodox content and

structure of the French drama of his time. On the one hand, he rejects all the old conventions of form, and on the other hand he works a revolution in dramatic purpose. In both directions, he has gone further than any of his countrymen, and in the case of the former, indeed, further than any other living dramatist, save perhaps Shaw and Gorky. Some of his later plays, in a current phrase, are veritable "slices of life," without either formal beginning or formal ending. He does not bring his curtain down upon an affecting reconciliation, nor even upon a thrilling tragedy; he merely brings it down. But all the while, of course, he remains too much the Frenchman ever to lose his dramatic sense entirely, and so even his most hortatory plays — for example, "Maternité" and "Le Berceau" — are occasionally enlivened by scenes which a Sardou or a Bernstein might envy. In the midst of his rebellion against empty artificiality he has managed to learn something from his opponents, and his later works, particularly "La Foi," "Les Hannetons" and the second version of "Maternité," reveal a very marked improvement in craftsmanship. You will get some measure of this progress in technical skill by putting the second of the plays in the present volume beside the first,

and remembering that four years separate them. "Blanchette," for all its approval by critics and public, is still full of amateurish blemishes, but in "The Escape" the author keeps a firm grip upon his material.

These plays have been chosen as representative of Brieux's theatre because each marks a high point in his progress. It was the production of "Blanchette" by André Antoine, in 1892, that brought Brieux his first success and lifted him to a definite position among contemporary French playwrights: until "Les Avariés" overshadowed it, indeed, he was chiefly known to the boulevards as *l'auteur de "Blanchette."* And it was "The Escape" ("L'Evasion") that opened the doors of the Théâtre Française to him, and won the honor of being crowned by the Academy, and paved the way for his election to the Forty fourteen years later. Both reveal very fairly his peculiar talents and his characteristic weaknesses. In each he depicts a small group of persons with Meissonier-like painstaking and realism, and in each he launches his javeline against a sham. But in each he is so deadly in earnest that he hurts his case by over-statement. After all, is there any reason to believe that Blanchette Rousset would *not* have obtained her teacher's

post in six months more? And is it fair to charge against the school system the fact that she is pursued by men wherever she goes to merchant her learning — and actually driven, in the original version of the play, to prostitution? Likewise, in "The Escape," isn't it true that Brieux's attack upon medical fads is hindered rather than helped by the fact that he makes his Dr. Bertry less a faddist than a downright charlatan? So in many of the later plays, the mark is overshot, the untypical is mistaken for the typical, the argument finds its answer in its unsound premises. I need cite only "Suzette," "Ménages d'Artistes," "La Berceau" and "Les Avariés." In each of them Brieux states a case which, in part at least, misrepresents the thing he attacks.

An even more serious charge against him is that of Philistinism: the standpoint from which he argues is not so much that of the constructive revolutionist as that of the immovable *bourgeoisie*. It is not to be wondered at, perhaps, that a man of his humble origin and narrow youthful associations should see life from that angle, but in more than one of his plays he reveals a complete lack of understanding of his butts as well as a complete lack of sympathy with them. This is notice-

able in the very first of his serious plays, "Ménages d'Artists," in which his onslaught upon the so-called symbolist movement in French poetry is quite as notable for its misconceptions as for its ferocity. It is noticeable again in "The Escape," where his attack upon the theory of inherited traits seems to be unaccompanied by any suspicion that there is, after all, a lot of support for it in demonstrable facts. And in some of his later dramas his argument against a given idea is no more than an argument for a platitude standing opposed to it. In no less than three plays, for example, he preaches the pious doctrine that a child constitutes an unbreakable bond between husband and wife, and that it is their prime duty to sacrifice all personal inclination to its welfare — a doctrine assaulted with murderous fury by August Strindberg. Here, indeed, Brieux takes his definite departure from Ibsen, and from all the acknowledged followers of Ibsen. His propaganda is not for the abandonment of an outworn morality, but for its resuscitation and reaffirmation. He has no Nietzschean doubts about the impeccability of the family, the value of the simple and lowly virtues, the moral order of the world. Even when he is most furiously assailing exist-

ing institutions, it is always evident that his wrath is directed, not at their ancient essentials, but at their modern embellishments. The brief that he holds is for respectability, for "sound" views, for "right-thinking" men — in M. de Ségur's stealthily ironic phrase, for "decent folk." He is not the sophisticated and cynical Frenchman of the boulevards and Anglo-Saxon tradition, but the stolid and God-fearing man of the people — *der Bauer im Frack.*

But perhaps the best way to get to an understanding of the growth and nature of Brieux's ideas is to examine his plays *seriatim* — leaving out of consideration, for the sake of brevity, the two that are given here and the three printed under the imprimatur of George Bernard Shaw. They reveal, with two exceptions, a serious moral purpose, and after "Blanchette," a rapidly increasing mastery over the materials of the theatre. Whatever one may say about them, there is certainly no lack of artistic courage in them. Brieux discusses the most grave — and, inferentially, the most dull — of human problems with unfailing address and plausibility, and even when he himself seems to be puzzled by them, as in "Maternité," for example, he is yet extremely interesting. Not many French in-

stitutions, whether social or political, have escaped his sardonic inspection. In "Les Bienfaiteurs" he is on the trail of fashionable charity; in "Résultat des Courses" he is preaching thunderously against betting; in "L'Engrenage" he is exposing both the wiles of politicians and the credulity of their dupes; in "Les Remplaçantes" he is picturing the horrors of wet-nursing; in "Les Hannetons" he is directing a fire of satire at the foes of marriage; in "La Française" he is defending his countrywomen — *i.e.*, his *bourgeois* countrywomen — against the libellous misrepresentations of the boulevard dramatists; in "La Robe Rouge" he is bringing a terrible incitement against the French judicial system. But whether his method be that of the satirist, as in "Les Hannetons" and "Les Bienfaiteurs," or that of the grim and unpitying social vivisectionist, as in "Résultat des Courses" and "Les Avariés," he always contrives to be on the respectable side of the question, and he always keeps the fact in mind that a stage play, to hold an audience, must have action in it — that the doctrine it lays down must be presented in terms of a conflict. Brieux is a million miles from Scribe and the well-made play, despite his acknowledgments to Augier, but he never tries to

make the drama static instead of dynamic, as Shaw does in "Married."

The first of Brieux's plays to reach the stage was "Bernard Palissy," a one-acter in verse, written in collaboration with Gaston Salandri in 1879, when the author was barely twenty-one. The central character, of course, is that Bernard Palissy (1509-1589) who invented the art of enamelling pottery, and the scene is his house at Saintes. He has been reduced to great poverty by his costly experiments, and his wife Geneviève is demanding that he abandon them and go back to his profitable glass-painting. Étienne Gautier, the fiancé of his daughter, Jeanne, adds pressure to this connubial persuasion, but Jeanne herself stands by him. Jeanne, indeed, is willing to sacrifice her love to her father's dream, but a kind fate makes this unnecessary. A terrific explosion is heard in the workshop. Palissy rushes off in despair, but a moment later returns in triumph. The secret of the enamel has been found! "Bernard Palissy" had its first and only performance at the Théâtre Cluny on December 21, 1879. It has never been translated into English.

"Le Bureau des Divorces," which followed, was also written in collaboration with Salandri.

It was published in 1880, but has never reached the stage. P. V. Thomas, in his monograph on Brieux, dismisses it as a cheap farce, "thin, stale and not amusing," but points out that its attack upon the French divorce law shows the early bent of Brieux's mind. It was followed by an unproductive interval of nearly ten years, broken at last by "Ménages d'Artistes" in 1890. Probably preceding the latter in date of composition, but reaching the stage four days later, came "La Fille de Duramé," a melodrama of revolutionary days, with the usual outfit of brigands, spies and gendarmes. It was written for a Rouen audience and had its first performance at the Théâtre Français in that city on March 25, 1890. It bears no sort of relation to the rest of Brieux's work.

"Ménages d'Artistes" (1890) is important as the play which brought Brieux to the attention of André Antoine and gave him his first serious hearing in Paris. It is a bitter, and not always convincing satire upon the *art pour l'art* movement of the 80's, with the symbolist poets as its targets. Jacques Tervaux, a ridiculous member of that brotherhood, is married to a simple girl who believes in his loud claims to genius. Even when he

launches into an undisguised affair with Emma Verner, a wealthy dilettante, poor Mme. Tervaux is unsuspecting. Not so, however, her shrewd old mother, who sees through this coalescence of soul mates at once, and presently turns Emma out of the house. Jacques follows, and the two set up a pretentious literary journal. But it suspends publication after a few numbers and Emma goes off with another man. Bankrupt in art and pocketbook, Jacques then commits suicide — a tragic ending for a somewhat rough farce. The piece has its moments, but in general its satire is hopelessly ignorant and Philistine. What it offers, indeed, is not an incisive criticism of the symbolists, but merely an ill-natured lampoon upon them.

Two years later came "Blanchette" (Théâtre Libre, February 2, 1892), and seven months afterward "M. de Réboval," or, as it was first called, "M. le Sénateur" (Odéon, September 15). It is in this piece that we first find Brieux voicing his eloquent argument for the homely virtues, the respectable point of view. Its intrigue is very simple and not at all original. M. de Réboval, a rich and powerful Senator, maintains two establishments and has two children, the one legitimate and the other

by a mistress. All goes well enough so long as the children are young, but when they grow up they meet and fall in love, and Réboval has to tell them the truth. They turn upon him and favor him with virtuous denunciations in Brieux's best manner, and at the end he acknowledges the viciousness of his life and begs for pardon. Mr. Thomas professes to regard the play as an attack on the *bourgeois*, but in reality its moral is one that all honest *bourgeois* must approve. It pleads for lawful monogamy in a serious tone quite as plainly as "Les Hannetons" pleads for it in tones of raillery.

"La Couvée" (1893) shows Brieux's first interest in a theme which was later to engage him in "Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont" and other plays: to wit, the evil worked by parents who seek to determine the whole future of their children. It is, however, in a lighter vein than its successors, and is given distinction by a very amusing clash between the mothers of the young folk. This scene was afterward turned into a one-acter under the title of "L'Ecole des Belles-Mères," an English version of which was printed in the *Smart Set* during the summer of 1913. "La Couvée," which is in three acts, was first

played by an amateur dramatic club at Rouen in 1893. Ten years later, on July 9, 1903, it was presented in Paris, again under private auspices. "L'Ecole des Belles-Mères" was done at the Gymnase on March 25, 1898.

"L'Engrenage," which followed "La Couvée" in 1894, is a three-act comedy of politics, and its two aims seem to be to expose the bribery which flourishes in France quite as balefully as in America, and to satirize the fickleness of a politician's following. Rémoussin, an honest provincial, is forced into standing for the Chamber of Deputies by his ambitious wife and daughter, and is elected after an exciting campaign. Before long he is beset by lobbyists for a tunnel scheme, and one of them, a rascal named Morin, succeeds in inveigling him into taking 25,000 francs, not as a personal bribe, but as "a contribution to the charities of his district." The transaction becomes public and Rémoussin throws himself upon the mercy of his constituents, pleading his lack of private profit and his good intent. What is more, he pays over the 25,000 francs to the Attorney-General. But the voters of the district denounce him as a thief, the while they give cheers for the less honest and more crafty Morin. The play

had its first performance at the Théâtre de la Comédie Parisienne on May 16, 1894, but was moved to the Théâtre des Nouveautés on June 4 following.

"Les Bienfaiteurs," which came after it, is a satire upon organized charity, showing on the one hand the pitiful insincerity of those who manage it, and on the other hand the lack of gratitude in those who benefit by it. The play is in four acts and had its first performance at the Théâtre de la Porte St. Martin on October 22, 1896. It was followed on December 7 of the same year by "L'Evasion" ("The Escape"), which saw the light at the Théâtre Française, and has remained in the repertoire of that house ever since. On October 8, 1897, came "Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont" (Gymnase), a return, in serious mood, to the theme of "La Couvée." The play is printed in Shaw's volume of Brieux translations. Its successor was "Résultat des Courses"— the cry of Paris newsboys with racing extras, — which was done at the Antoine on December 9, 1898. Here we see how Arsène Chantaud, an honest workingman, is ruined by a chance success at the races. Once he has fingered unearned money, the gambling fever has him in its clutches, and he proceeds from

idleness to actual theft. In the end he is arrested for vagrancy. Brieux entered a Paris factory to get atmosphere and color for this piece, but the workmen quickly penetrated his disguise. It is in his most earnest manner.

"Le Berceau," which had its first performance at the Théâtre Française on December 19, 1898, ten days after "Résultat des Courses," is the first of three plays dealing with a new "eternal triangle" — the husband, the wife and the child. Raymond Chantrel and his wife have been divorced, and Mme. Chantrel has been married again and is now Mme. de Girieu. The child of the first union, a boy called Julien, has been awarded to the mother by the court. One day he falls desperately ill at the home of her parents, and his mother and father are brought together at his bedside. They pass days and nights of anxiety there, and gradually their old love awakens. But they determine to stand firmly against it in justice to Girieu — and then the dramatist solves a knotty problem by catastrophe. That is to say, he has Chantrel and Girieu meet in physical combat and go over a precipice together. A splendid scene of the theatre, but scarcely a logical resolution of the situation. The significance of the play lies in its attack upon

divorce. Its theme appears again, though with variations, in "La Déserteuse" and "Suzette."

After "Le Berceau" came "La Robe Rouge" (Théâtre du Vaudeville, March 15, 1900; Théâtre Française, September 23, 1909), perhaps the most effective dramatically of all Brieux's plays. It is a devastating attack upon the administration of justice in the French courts, and no doubt had its inspiration in the Dreyfus case. Mouzon, a provincial magistrate, smarting under newspaper criticism for his failure to apprehend the perpetrator of a murder and eager to attract the favorable notice of his superiors, fixes upon an ignorant peasant named Etchepare as the culprit, and then proceeds, by shameless bullying, to manufacture enough evidence to convict. Among other things, he extorts from Etchepare's wife the story of a disgraceful episode before her marriage — an episode hitherto unknown to Etchepare himself. After a long trial, the man is finally acquitted, but his home is destroyed and he departs for America. Then Yanetta, the wife, driven to distraction, seizes a paper-knife on Mouzon's desk and plunges it into his heart. The role of Mouzon afforded great opportunities to the actor, Hugue-

net, and his performance helped the piece to success. Brieux withdrew it from the repertoire of the Théâtre Française when Huguenet left the company, in July, 1911. The play was done in London as "The Arm of the Law" by Arthur Bourchier.

"La Robe Rouge" was followed by "Les Remplaçantes" (Antoine, February 15, 1901), an attempt to maintain the somewhat obvious thesis that the custom of putting babies out to nurse is injurious to the child itself and demoralizing to both the mother and the wet-nurse. Lazarette Planchot, a peasant woman, goes up to Paris to nurse the baby of Mme. Denisart, a wealthy society woman, leaving her own offspring to the tender mercies of her drunken husband and her avaricious father-in-law. One day a telegram comes from her home, telling her that her baby is very ill, but Mme. Denisart is expecting guests and so conveniently forgets to hand it to her. Next day, however, she learns its contents and at once departs for her home. There she finds that her husband is throwing away her earnings in a wine-shop and carrying on an affair with another woman. She puts this other woman to flight, brings her husband home,

and throws herself into a battle for her baby's life. The infant Denisart is forgotten.

"Les Avariés" is next in the Brieux canon. It was written in 1901 and put into rehearsal at the Théâtre Antoine in the autumn of that year, but the censor forbade its performance, and it did not actually reach the stage in Paris until February 23, 1905. But meanwhile Brieux had read it to several private audiences and it had been played at Liége and Brussels, and, if I do not err, in Switzerland also. John Pollock's English translation was published by Shaw in 1910, and on March 14, 1913, it was given a private matinée performance at the Fulton Theatre in New York, under the auspices of the *Medical Review of Reviews*. There was some disposition on the part of professional Puritans to object to public performances, but a number of clerical uplifters came gallantly to the rescue, and the play was soon afterward openly presented. At the conclusion of the New York run, the company proceeded to a tour, and before the end of the year "Damaged Goods" had been set before the theatre-goers of two dozen cities. Its presentation was the signal for an avalanche of so-called "sex" plays, but the majority of them were so plainly meretricious

that the police finally interfered, and several of the worst were either disinfected or wholly prohibited.

A year after "Les Avariés" Brieux wrote "La Petite Amie" (Théâtre Française, May 3, 1902), a return to the theme of "Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont," this time with a tragic ending. M. Logerais, proprietor of a large dressmaking establishment, is bent upon marrying his son André to a rich girl, but André has fallen in love with Marguerite, one of his father's shop-girls. In an American play the easy solution would be an elopement, but by the French marriage law André cannot marry without his father's consent until he is twenty-five. It is too long for the lovers to wait, and so they dispense with the knot. When Marguerite finds that she is about to become a mother they throw themselves into the Seine. After "La Petite Amie" came "Maternité," and as the Shaw translation shows, Brieux wrote two endings for it, the second being much superior to the first. Its successor was "La Déserteuse" (Odéon, October 15, 1904), in which Brieux had the aid of Jean Sigaux. Here we have another consideration of the effect of divorce upon the children. Forjot, the father, remarries after his wife

runs off with a musician, and his daughter Pascaline is brought up in ignorance of her mother's sinning. Years later the latter returns to the scene and tries to win Pascaline's love. Forjot then tells the whole story, and the broken-hearted Pascaline turns her back on her mother.

There followed "L'Armature" (Vaudeville, April 19, 1905), an unimportant dramatization of a novel by Paul Hervieu, a fellow dramatist. After it came "Les Hannetons" (Rennaissance, February 3, 1906), which has been done into English and presented in the United States by Laurence Irving, first as "The Incubus" (Hackett Theatre, New York, April 27, 1909) and later as "The Affinity" (Comedy Theatre, January 4, 1910). It deals amusingly with the adventures of Pierre Cotrel, an "advanced" thinker, who shows distrust of the tyrannies and responsibilities of marriage by setting up unofficial housekeeping with one Charlotte, a simple-minded working-girl. But, alas for poor Pierre, he quickly finds that a "free" union is quite as lacking in actual freedom as a marriage with bell and book. Charlotte henpecks him, is unfaithful to him, and finally runs away from him. He then determines to depart from the scene of their

experiment himself, and gets together his small savings — 200 francs — for the purpose. But just as he is about to go, Charlotte is carried up the stairs. She has tried to commit suicide by jumping into the Seine, and Pierre, as in duty bound, pays the 200 francs to her rescuer! A grimly ironical little comedy, well voicing Brieux's Philistine distrust of the revolutionaries who propose to make over the fundamental institutions of Christian society.

"La Française," which followed (Odéon, April 18, 1907), is a defense of French womanhood against foreign, and particularly American misunderstanding. The principal personages are Mme. Gontier, the young wife of an elderly French manufacturer, and one Bartlett, an American friend and business associate of her nephew. Bartlett's notion of Frenchwomen has been gained from popular plays and novels, and so, when Mme. Gontier shows him politeness, he mistakes it for an invitation and attempts to kiss her. She quickly hauls him up, and he is later enlightened as to the true morals of French wives, and all ends happily. Brieux's secondary target in the play, of course, is the conventional drama of the boulevards, with its monotonous variations upon the theme of adultery. A bit of the dialogue between

Bartlett and Mme. Gontier will serve to show the nature of his protest:

Bartlett. For ten years I have been reading your French novels; pictures, as I understood them, of French morals. Not one was there in which a woman did not deceive her husband. I arrive at Trouville, and everything there is most easy-going and irresponsible. At Paris I go to the theatre, four nights running to four different theatres, and yet I am hardly able to believe that I am not seeing the same play. I am not entirely correct — the last one I saw was different from the others — the heroine did not have a lover — she had three. And the women that I have met in Paris —

Mme. Gontier. You must not judge Frenchwomen by our novels nor our plays, nor yet by the Parisian ladies who have been so hospitable to you. And it is necessary that you should learn that, in spite of all that you have read, in spite or all that you have seen, you know nothing of either the literature or the women of this country. . . . Thank God that despite vilification there are honest women in France. They are those you do not see, the great majority, who live wrapped up in their husbands and their children and their homes — in those homes where you foreigners never penetrate. They are the women that you do not see on the boulevards, nor meet in promenades at concerts, nor in those centres of debauchery where you, the foreigners, are the best clients.

Of the remaining plays, "Simone" (Théâtre Française, April 13, 1908) deals with a husband's murder of his unfaithful wife, and with the effect of the crime upon their daughter; "Suzette" (Vaudeville, September 28, 1909) is a return to the theme of "Le Berceau" and "La Déserteuse"; "La Foi" (His Majesty's, London, September 14, 1909) is an argument for the necessity of faith; and "La Femme Seule" (Gymnase, December,

1912) is a tract against the "emancipated" woman, with passages reminiscent of "Blanchette." The husband in "Simone" is Edouard de Sergeac. Just before the play opens he surprises his wife in the arms of his best friend. Mad with rage, he shoots her and then turns the weapon against himself. The lover commits suicide. But the husband recovers from his wound. His future existence is consecrated to his daughter Simone, who is six years old when the tragedy happens, and who is led to believe that her mother has been the victim of an accident in the hunting field. Simone grows up happy by the side of her father, who adores her, and for her sake keeps her in ignorance of the character of her mother. In this he succeeds until the day comes when a young neighbor, Michel Mignier, asks her hand in marriage. Then the truth is out. Mignier *perè* institutes inquiries, learns of the suspicious weighing on De Sergeac and breaks off the marriage. It is a love match, and Simone is inconsolable. She in turn questions her father, and in a poignant scene he confesses that fifteen years before he had been guilty of a serious wrong, but he refuses to give her any details. Through the

incautiousness of an old servant, however, she learns the facts.

In the original version of the play Simone's discovery that her father's hands are stained by the blood of her mother sends her from him in loathing. She trembles in his presence, shrinks from him and refuses to forgive him, and the curtain falls on her departure. The first-night audience at the Théâtre Française found this ending unsatisfactory, and Brieux willingly changed it, as he had changed those of "Blanchette" and "Maternité" before it, making Simone forgive her father and marry Michel, whose love overcomes the elder Mignier's objections.

In "Suzette" we see how Henri Chamfort, a decent young fellow, is led into suspicions of his somewhat gay wife by the evil suggestions of his parents, who dislike her. Finally he drives her out of the house and she takes their child, Suzette, with her. Henri is eager for a divorce, but Régine, conscious of her innocence, refuses to agree to it, and even threatens to denounce Henri for a secret fraud if he persists. But in the end she is forced to acquiesce in order to save little Suzette, who is the helpless victim of the whole lamentable quarrel. In "La Femme Seule" we see

a woman's struggles to maintain herself in the face of masculine competition. Thérèse, the woman, is an orphan without a *dot* and so she cannot hope for marriage. She goes into the world as a journalist, but ill fortune pursues her, and later she also fails as a bookbinder. In the end she succumbs to a lover. The play aroused much discussion in Paris, and Brieux himself told the *Matin* that he planned it as a protest against the disinclination of Frenchmen to marry dowerless wives — a disinclination that is filling the country with old maids, and disorganizing all those industries in which women can compete with men.

"La Foi," which Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree presented upon a grand scale in London, with music by Camille Saint-Saëns, is the only one of Brieux's later plays which does not deal with the men and women of today, and even here the theme has its modern hearings, despite the early Egyptian setting of the story. The central character is Satni, a young Egyptian priest who has travelled in far countries, and brought back skepticism. He sees his people bowing down to false gods; worse still, he sees the girl of his heart, Yaouma, going as a willing sacrifice to the terrible river god. Against all this degrading superstition he lifts

his voice, and because he has eloquence, the people listen to him. The false gods are overturned; Yaouma is saved. But Egypt without a religion is now in worse case than Egypt with a false religion. The restraints of the priests thrown off, the people proceed to childish lawlessness, and Satni himself is forced to make some effort to turn them back. In the end, of course, the old gods triumph. The human soul demands a rock and a refuge: an unreasoning faith is necessary to man. * * *

Brieux was born in the old Temple quarter of Paris on January 19, 1858, and is the son of a carpenter. He began his schooling under the Frères de la Doctrine Crétienne, but was soon removed to the Ecole Primaire, or public primary school, and from there proceeded to the Ecole Primaire Supérieure. This was as far as he ever got, for his parents died when he was fifteen and he had to shift for himself. He obtained a small clerkship and determined to continue his studies on his own account, but the difficulties of Greek grammar cooled his enthusiasm for learning, and he was soon devoting most of his leisure to miscellaneous reading. He was seventeen before he entered a theatre for the first time, but meanwhile

he had read most of the great plays in the French repertoire and had also made himself acquainted with a good many foreign works, including Goethe's "Faust." This last stirred him to the depths, and he himself has told us that he "got drunk upon it." Not much money reached his till in those days and he could not afford to pay for lights for reading, so he would seek the bright places along the boulevards, a 25-centime book in hand, and there read by the free gaslight of the municipality.

A reserved and studious lad, he took little part in boyish games during his schooldays and had few friends as a youth. His dearest ambition, toward the end of his teens, was to become a missionary to the heathen, but the Marquis de Ségur tells us that this aim began to lose its attractions as he came to realize that there were "as many heathen in Paris as in the distant wilds." In place of it there arose an irresistible desire to write, or, more accurately, to teach, and its first fruits were several one-act plays, chiefly in verse. The Paris managers showed little interest in these productions, but after a time — he was then a month short of his majority — he got a production at the Théâtre Cluny, on the

south bank of the Seine, for "Bernard Palissy." It had a single performance at one of the Cluny's *matinées des jeunes* and was thereafter heard of no more. A year later it was published in a thin pamphlet. The same year he and Gaston Salandri wrote "Le Bureau des Divorces."

By this time Brieux had determined upon a literary career, and like many another young author before him, he turned to journalism as a preliminary means of livelihood. His beginnings were made at Dieppe, where he spent several years as reporter and editor. Then he was called to Rouen to take the editorial chair on *La Nouvelliste*, and there he attained to a very respectable position as a journalist. What is more important, this service gave him that firm grip upon vital problems which has been his distinguishing mark ever since. On the one hand, he was kept aloof from the kaleidoscopic literary fads of the Paris boulevards, and on the other hand he was compelled, by the exigencies of his calling, to give constant and serious attention to the *malaises* of civilization. He became the typical journalist — a bit of a politician, a bit of a lawyer; even a bit of a priest. He learned something about everything under the sun; he began to

work out theories of amelioration and reform; his earlier missionarying impulse began to take on coherence and direction. The result was a return to play-writing — but now he had something to say. The first manager to find it out was André Antoine, who had established the famous Théâtre Libre in 1888. Antoine accepted the provincial editor's "Ménages d'Artistes" early in 1890, and it was presented at the Théâtre Libre. The play failed of a popular success, but it convinced Antoine of the author's talents, and thereafter he was an invaluable ally and adviser. Since then, either at the Libre, or at the Antoine and the Odéon, he has produced six of Brieux's plays — "Blanchette," "Résultat des Courses," "Les Remplaçantes," "Les Avariés," "Maternité" and "La Française."

La Nouvelliste suspended publication early in 1892, and Brieux came up to Paris. A few months before this "Blanchette" had been presented at the Théâtre Libre, with Antoine himself as Pére Rousset, and its success had been so great that the author, now thirty-four years old, found himself a celebrity in the capital. He was still unwilling, however, to trust his whole fortunes to play-writing, and so he sought and obtained a post on the

Figaro and continued at journalism for half a dozen years longer. But after the acceptance of "L'Evasion" by the Comédie Française toward the end of 1896, the managers of Paris began to show a great eagerness for his manuscripts, and since 1898 he has devoted his whole time to dramatic composition. "L'Evasion," "Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont," "La Robe Rouge" and "Les Avariés" served to fortify his position: both the critics and the public began to give him very respectful attention. In 1910, he received the honor that is the goal of all Frenchmen of letters: election to the Académie Française. By the irony of fate, the vacant seat among the forty immortals was that of Ludovic Halévy (librettist of "La Belle Hélène" and "La Grande-Duchesse de Gerolstein"!), and there were two formidable rival candidates, Alfred Capus and Georges de Porto-Riche. But Brieux was chosen, and on May 12 he was formally received by his new brethren.

The Marquis de Ségur, in his address to the candidate on that occasion, reviewed the profound impression that the early work of Brieux had produced, and attempted to define his relation to the other French dramatists of the day. "Accustomed to the methods of the

usual playwrights," said M. de Ségur, "the manager of the Théâtre Libre was filled with astonishment when he read your play. For this maiden effort of yours had a startling freshness and showed a daring that verged upon extravagance. Would you believe it? — the author actually championed sound morals as against folly, and the family as against chaos. He went the length of depicting a prosperous home that was not befouled by all conceivable vices. He asserted that virtues could exist, even outside the purlieus of want and starvation. Alongside these audacities the play was not lacking in dramatic power. It comprised several delightful scenes. The spectators, though amazed at first, decided to overlook its scandalous decency."

And then M. de Ségur proceeded to a description of the Brieux type of play — the drama of ideas as opposed to the drama of mere intrigue. "The hour had arrived," he said, "when a long-indulgent public was beginning to weary of the poisonous bill of fare upon which it had for several years been exclusively nourished. Certain far-seeing individuals were asking themselves whether the world was entirely made up of scamps and crooks and bad women, and whether there

might not exist here and there a few of those average people who lay no claim to perfection, but who are not altogether deserving of scorn and hatred — the people, in other words, who are commonly spoken of as 'decent folks.' You arrived just in time to justify this discovery, and you saw at a glance what path you ought to follow. You conceived the idea of the 'useful play,' whose object is not merely to make people think, but to make them live more nobly. You limited your horizon the better to embrace it; you specialized your work, so as to make it the more effectual."

"The useful play," said M. de Ségur — that was Brieux's aim and achievement. Some called him "the Tolstoi of the Faubourg du Temple." He drew his themes from current events, from the burning questions of the hour, and he treated them with the firm conscience of the artist and the profound understanding of the philosopher. He was awake to the perils which menaced France, and with France, the whole of civilization. He had "sounded the tocsin" — in fact, made a profession of sounding it. He had gone about with "the sincerest fervor, the most robust sanity of mind," and yet with "a tranquil

good nature that added a charming note to the clangor of alarm bells."

Brieux himself, in the *Revue Bleue*, once stated his artistic creed clearly. "I know very well," he said, "what the public likes to see on the stage. Its choice is the spectacle of a human will which evolves and asserts itself. It demands (though without knowing very clearly what it demands) that the dramatic author should be a Professor of Energy. But it seems to me that the dramatic author should be an intermediary between the public and those great thoughts of great thinkers which are ordinarily inaccessible to the masses. He ought to offer to the public, in an interesting shape, beautiful and generous ideas. Yes, that is the rôle appointed for us: to seduce the public by placing the ideas of the philosophers within its reach.

"The theatre will be obliged, more and more as time goes on, to devote itself to the study of the great topics of the day. There is nothing more to be made of the comedy of character — Molière has seen to that. The comedy of manners? There is plenty of that in the dramas of the day, but it does not animate them with the breath of life. Let us therefore put a thought into each of our works; and let

us take it from the life around us, and from the sufferings of our fellow-creatures. As Goethe said: 'Fill your heart and mind with the ideas and emotions of your period — the work will then write itself.'"

—*H. L. Mencken.*

BLANCHETTE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ROUSSET ..... A PEASANT
MME. ROUSSET ..... HIS WIFE
BLANCHETTE ..... THEIR DAUGHTER
GALOUX ..... A WEALTHY LANDOWNER
LUCIE ..... HIS DAUGHTER, AND FRIEND OF BLANCHETTE
GEORGE ..... HIS SON
MME. JULES ..... COOK AT THE GALOUX'S
MORILLON ..... A PEASANT
AUGUSTE ..... HIS SON
BONENFANT ..... A ROADMENDER
AN EXPRESSMAN.
A POSTMAN.

THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN THE COUNTRY.
TIME — THE PRESENT.

BLANCHETTE

ACT I.

The interior of a small village tavern.

To the left, a slightly elevated counter, on which are bottles and empty glasses. In the foreground, a round table. On the wall, a shelf filled with bottles. A door leading into the house.

To the right, in the foreground, a glass door with white curtains leading to the street.

In the center, a little to the right, a round table covered with oilcloth.

On the back wall hangs a framed teacher's degree; distributed about are chromo lithographs of the four seasons in the form of young, blonde and dark-haired girls; an official notice of the law on public drunkenness, etc. There are also pictures of Carnot and General Boulanger.

In the background there are two windows looking out on to the road. The curtains are kept back by pots of geraniums.

September.

Mme. Rousset is fifty years old. She wears a waist and skirt of gray repp, and a blue apron. Rousset is sixty years old. He has smooth gray hair and a florid complexion. He has on gray cloth trousers and a brown vest, with a white shirt. He wears a silver watch chain.

Mme. Jules is a cook in a good family. She wears a black dress and a white apron.

When the curtain rises Rousset is at the door, smoking his pipe. Mme. Rousset is putting some vegetables into Mme. Jules' basket.

MME. ROUSSET. There's no one at your house for dinner?

MME. JULES. No.

MME. ROUSSET. You've all you need then? You know I'm not in the habit of — you are the only one we sell vegetables to.

MME. JULES. That's all, mère Rousset.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Puts three glasses on the counter and fills them with brandy. Then she calls*] Come in, père Rousset, come in and have a drink.

ROUSSET. I'm coming. [*He enters*] To your health! [*They all drink*]

MME. JULES. To yours!

MME. ROUSSET. I'll have to enter some things. [*She opens a drawer and takes out an account book in which she does some entering during the following conversation*]

ROUSSET. Always happy, Madame Jules?

MME. JULES. Always! I've been down there in the house for twenty-five years now, and my husband has been with me twenty of them; and we are very comfortable.

ROUSSET. It's really so. How time flies!

MME. JULES. Oh, heavens, yes! I knew you as a young girl, Elisabeth.

MME. ROUSSET. That's true. We were friends before that good-for-nothing over there wheedled me into marrying him.

MME. JULES. Why, of course. I was even your maid of honor. I practically saw your daughter born, and I am sure that I love her as much as you do. How time does fly! And how many times I've come here to buy provisions for Monsieur Galoux!

ROUSSET. Why here he comes himself.

MME. JULES. My master?

ROUSSET. Yes.

MME. JULES. I'm going. [*She drains her glass*] *Au revoir*, Elisabeth. *Au revoir*, père Rousset.

ROUSSET AND MME. ROUSSET. *Au revoir*, Madame Jules. [*She leaves*]

MME. ROUSSET. Is Monsieur Galoux going back to the house?

ROUSSET. Probably.

MME. ROUSSET. Call him!

ROUSSET. Why?

MME. ROUSSET. One can always put in a good word for our daughter. That can't do any harm.

ROUSSET. He'll not listen to us.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes he will.

ROUSSET. You think so?

MME. ROUSSET. Oh, heavens! In three months he's going up for deputy —

ROUSSET. You're right. Be quiet, here he comes. [*Raising his voice*] How do you do, Monsieur Galoux? Your cook just left here.

[*Monsieur Galoux is a man of fifty-five. He wears a jacket and a soft hat. His hair is turning gray. Enters from the right.*]

GALOUX. [*Shaking hands with Rousset*] Yes, I saw her. Well, everything going well with you, père Rousset?

ROUSSET. Things are going pretty slowly. But come in, Monsieur Galoux, come in.

GALOUX. Thank you. [*To Mme. Rousset*] How do you do, Madame Rousset?

MME. ROUSSET. How do you do, Monsieur Galoux? [*Rousset has closed the door*]

ROUSSET. Will you sit down? [*He draws his footstool out from under the round table*] It's a wonderful morning.

GALOUX. Yes it is.

MME. ROUSSET. What can I offer you?

GALOUX. Oh, thank you! I never take anything before luncheon. How is business?

MME. ROUSSET. Well, you know the shop doesn't bring in much. There are days when we don't have a single customer. I can tell

you it's lucky that père Rousset is tilling our land.

ROUSSET. And one has troubles besides. A piece of land that we bought when business was good — we had our tobacco shop then — was taken away from us and given to the owner of the other tavern — because a former minister came to live in a house in Paris where his cousin was the *concierge*. I tell you, things can hardly go on like this much longer.

MME. ROUSSET. But that is not the real reason why time hangs heavy upon us.

GALOUX. Well, what is the reason? Tell me.

MME. ROUSSET. It's on account of Blanchette — on account of Elise — that is, our daughter. When she was small she was always very pale, so we called her Blanchette, and that name has clung to her ever since. It is on her account that —

ROUSSET. Why, yes. Look here, Monsieur Galoux, people are always talking about the government — you who are going to be deputy ought to know that.

GALOUX. Oh, but you are going very fast.

ROUSSET. Very fast! Let me tell you — when père Rousset says something it's as if a lawyer had passed on it. I'm not a fool! I never went to school, that's true. And even if

I can hardly read or write there are some people whom I could show a thing or two. Well! can you tell me what good there is in that piece of paper that the government gave to our daughter? [*He goes to rear of stage, gets on a bench and takes down the framed teacher's degree from the wall*] There are enough seals and signatures on it. Look, you who have good eyes, read it! I'll go and get my glasses. [*He goes to the counter on which his glasses are lying, and puts them on.*]

GALOUX. What's this? Ah, it's Blanchette's teacher's degree.

ROUSSET. Yes. It just came back from the picture framer's this morning. They can well put it under glass, for it cost us enough.

MME. ROUSSET. Only the good Lord knows how much it did cost.

ROUSSET. It's all right too. [*Reading*] "French Republic — A degree for elementary teaching. Teachers — First class degree — According to the law — According to the ministerial decree — According to the verbal process — According to the certificate — Deliver to Mademoiselle Elise Marguerite Rousset this degree."

GALOUX. I understand.

ROUSSET. Very good! It's six months now since they declared her qualified to be a teacher — and now why don't they take her?

GALOUX. Because there are others ahead of her.

ROUSSET. What do I care about the others? Are there any who are brighter than my Blanchette? Your daughter, Mademoiselle Lucie, can tell you about her, as they went to the same school.

GALOUX. My daughter does speak of Mademoiselle Elise, who is her best friend, every day; you know we take a great interest in your daughter. I promise to put in a word to the prefect.

ROUSSET. Yes — the prefect had better hurry, because, you know, these delays, these — from a political standpoint they do not make a good impression in the canton. I am telling you about it. People will say that the workingmen are not properly protected.

GALOUX. I promise you that I'll look after this.

ROUSSET. That will be very good of you. You know young people must work. You didn't make your fortune by twirling your thumbs, but in selling good leather. And I don't want to have any one lazy in my family.

GALOUX. You are perfectly right. Tell Mademoiselle Elise to have patience.

MME. ROUSSET. But the poor thing is so bored.

GALOUX. Lucie will come and see her very soon.

ROUSSET. That's right.

MME. ROUSSET. But won't you really take anything? Not even a small glass of brandy!

GALOUX. No thank you. I am going now.

ROUSSET. Well can we count on you, Monsieur Galoux?

GALOUX. Yes, but have patience.

ROUSSET. Patience! Patience! That's easy to say! With all of that, it's always the workingman who is the fool in the play. The State is deceiving us.

GALOUX. But how is that?

ROUSSET. Why when it offered to give my daughter an education by inventing easy terms, *concours;* by distributing scholarships and making promises! And it should keep its word. Formerly I listened to the mayor; and then I listened to you, who are in politics. You persuaded me to let my Blanchette go to school by making me expect a heap of things, saying that she would make money after she received her degree. Now she has it, and now that ought to let her earn her living and find her a position. And remember this, I am not asking a favor: no, it is owed to me. There is the paper! [*Pointing to the degree*] It has fallen due: it must be paid!

GALOUX. But your daughter must wait her turn. The others would complain and say that it was an injustice.

ROUSSET. What do I care about other people! I want what is owed to me! Other people's affairs don't bother me. Let them protest. Let them settle their own business!

GALOUX. I again repeat that I will see the prefect tomorrow. Good-bye. [*He leaves*]

ROUSSET. [*Coming down the stage*] How silly of him! We wouldn't need him if it were only a question of getting our rights.

MME. ROUSSET. That's true enough!

ROUSSET. Is Blanchette up yet?

MME. ROUSSET. Oh, yes! I heard her walking about in her room a long while ago. [*To herself as she goes out*] I'll have to wake her anyway, the little chit — she'd sleep until noon.

ROUSSET. I'll hang this up again. [*He hangs the degree back in its place. Morillon and his son Auguste enter. They have just returned from the fields. They remove their hats as they enter. They sit down at a table and are silent for quite a while*]

ROUSSET. Coffee?

MORILLON. Coffee.

ROUSSET. [*Takes some cups and saucers from the counter. Calls*] Wife, bring some coffee.

MORILLON. [*To Rousset, who is putting the*

cups on the table] Aren't you going to have any?

ROUSSET. All right, I'll take some, too. [*He brings a cup for himself and sits down*]

MME. ROUSSET. [*Pouring the coffee*] Fine day!

MORILLON. Yes, it's great weather for working. [*Mme. Rousset leaves*]

ROUSSET. Look here! Is it today that we are going to come to an understanding about that piece of land?

MORILLON. Do you always have it on your mind?

ROUSSET. Well, I surround it on three sides, and it bothers me. If it were mine, I could plough in a straight line from here right to the church. That would be fine! I've been trying to buy that land from you now for ten years.

MORILLON. We're in no hurry.

ROUSSET. If you want to, I'll trade it for my land along the river's edge, which is almost as large — I said "almost." And what difference can it make to you who are a wheelwright! You only work on your land now and then with your lad there — in the mornings or on Sundays. And the bit of land I'm talking about is nearer to your shop.

MORILLON. You'd like it very much then! Hein?

ROUSSET. Not at all! I'm doing it in the interest of every one. Hey, wife, give us a drop to drink!

[*Auguste goes back to look at the degree*]

AUGUSTE. Father!

MORILLON. What?

AUGUSTE. The degree.

MORILLON. [*Softly to his son*] It's true then?

AUGUSTE. It's true. Tell him, father, that I want to marry her.

MORILLON. In a minute. [*To Rousset*] So Blanchette is going to be a teacher — like Mademoiselle Dumesnil?

ROUSSET. Why — it says so there — all signed by the government. You can read, can't you, Auguste?

MORILLON. What a foolish question! He went to school until he was twelve, and he was a year in the army. And you know very well that he came back a corporal.

ROUSSET. Let him read it then.

MORILLON. I guess she has to be pretty smart.

ROUSSET. Oh, yes! I don't know what she doesn't know. Her teacher said that she had nothing more to learn. Why the day before yesterday there was an instructor here who

wanted to talk politics to her. And, believe me, she shut him up pretty quick.

MORILLON. Who? The instructor?

ROUSSET. Why not? Do you suppose that just because she's père Rousset's daughter she can't be bright? Mademoiselle Galoux is only the eighth in the district. And you know how Blanchette ranks, don't you?

MORILLON. No.

ROUSSET. Well, she is third.

MORILLON. Third! Is she earning any money now?

ROUSSET. No. But she will when she has her position.

MORILLON. Yes, but when will that be?

ROUSSET. When! When! Tomorrow if we wanted her to. The prefect just told Monsieur Galoux to ask us whether we had decided to let her go now. But I want her to rest a bit. I tell you, you find mighty few like her.

MORILLON. You are right, père Rousset.

ROUSSET. [*Going to the table*] Will you have a drink?

MORILLON. I'll not say no. [*He drinks*] Well, I'll be back soon — and then I'll have something to tell you.

ROUSSET. About that bit of land?

MORILLON. Yes — and something else, perhaps.

ROUSSET. That's right. We'll try to come to an understanding. See you later.

[*They leave. Rousset carries the cups and saucers into the next room without closing the door. Calling to Mme. Rousset*]

ROUSSET. And Blanchette? Isn't she up yet?

MME. ROUSSET. She's in her room, drawing.

ROUSSET. [*Calling*] Oh, Blanchette, Blanchette! Have you finished with your old codger? [*To Mme. Rousset, after listening*] What does she say?

MME. ROUSSET. [*Still outside*] She says that she is coming down — that her drawing is finished.

ROUSSET. Tell her to bring it with her. I'll get my glasses. [*He gets his glasses from the counter and puts them on. He returns to the door at the left*] All right!

BLANCHETTE. [*Comes in with her drawings*] Here you are, father!

ROUSSET. Come over here!

[*Blanchette is twenty-one years old. She has auburn hair, and is neither pretty nor homely. She is dressed very simply, but there is a certain affectation visible.*]

ROUSSET. Come, let's see! [*He goes to the window and looks at the drawing*] This one is the model, isn't it?

BLANCHETTE. Not at all. That one is the model.

ROUSSET. By Jove, one can't tell them apart at all. Here. [*He puts them on the table*] Wait a moment. [*Calling*] Hey, there! wife! [*To Blanchette*] Don't tell her anything. We'll ask her which one the model is. Come here, mother.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Outside*] But I'm washing the glasses.

ROUSSET. That doesn't make any difference. Come just the same. I'll bet that she won't know which one the model is. [*Mme. Rousset comes in. Her cuffs are turned up, and she is wiping her hands on her apron.*]

MME. ROUSSET. What do you want?

BLANCHETTE. Mother saw me doing it, so she'll know.

ROUSSET. By heavens, that's true! [*Looking out of the window into the street*] Who is that going over there?

BLANCHETTE. That is Bonenfant, the road-mender.

ROUSSET. Hey, Bonenfant. Come here. [*He goes to the door*]

BLANCHETTE. Father! Father! Please don't, it's not worth while.

ROUSSET. Leave me alone — I tell you he'll not be able to tell them apart.

BLANCHETTE. He doesn't know anything about it.

ROUSSET. Doesn't have to. [*He opens the door*] Ah, Bonenfant! Come here!

BONENFANT. What do you want?

ROUSSET. [*To Blanchette and Mme. Rousset*] Sh! Don't say anything.

BONENFANT. [*Enters, his hat in hand*] At your service.

ROUSSET. Come over here. Look at these two pictures. Which do you like best?

BONENFANT. Who is it?

BLANCHETTE. Romulus.

BONENFANT. Don't know him.

ROUSSET. [*Bursts out laughing*] Ha, ha, ha! He doesn't know who Romulus is. He's dead, isn't he?

BLANCHETTE. Yes, father.

ROUSSET. Tell him something about Romulus —

BLANCHETTE. Oh, what's the use!

ROUSSET. Just to show that you're not a stupid girl, and that I did not waste my money in sending you to school until you were twenty years old. Tell him who Romulus was.

BLANCHETTE. [*In a natural voice*] "Romulus is considered the founder of Rome. In the year 776 before Christ, Numitor, king or dictator of Alba Longa, was dethroned by his brother

Amulius. His sister, Rhea Sylvia, who was a vestal virgin, consecrated to the divine cult, became the mother of twins, Romulus and Remus."

ROUSSET. [*Who has been watching his daughter with pride*] You didn't know that? Nor I either. She's not as stupid as us, you know. —The other day there was an instructor here who wanted to talk politics, and she stopped him up as quick as a flash.

BONENFANT. I tell you, the children of today!

ROUSSET. Now that you know the old codger, tell me which one you like best. Sh! Don't you others say anything.

BONENFANT. I like the one as well as the other.

ROUSSET. But which one is the model?

BONENFANT. That one.

ROUSSET. [*At the very height of joy*] That's Blanchette's drawing! Ha, ha, ha! [*He gives him a hearty slap on the shoulder*] Ha, ha, my old friend, if you want to learn more before you die you'll have to hurry up and go to school.

BONENFANT. [*Also laughing*] Of course! — You remember, don't you, Blanchette, when I used to wheel you around in my wheelbarrow? —I never thought at that time —

BLANCHETTE. [*A trifle embarrassed*] Certainly, monsieur.

BONENFANT. Ah! So it's "monsieur"! You never used to call me "monsieur" when you rode on my shoulders, or when you climbed trees to find nests like a regular boy. You weren't afraid of showing your leg at that time. [*He, Rousset, and Mme. Rousset burst out laughing. Blanchette only smiles*] Now she's like a princess though. You remember in Guimbard's field when their man chased you after you had stolen some apples?

BLANCHETTE. [*Smiling*] He had his dog, Pataud, with him.

BONENFANT. You remember Pataud? He's dead. Well, I'm going, for if you're going to begin speaking about Pataud I'll be here until tomorrow morning. Good-bye to all of you. [*He leaves*]

ROUSSET. Good-bye, père Bonenfant. And he never knew which one was the model.

MME. ROUSSET. We'll have to have it framed.

ROUSSET. That's right. We'll put it alongside of the degree. Oh, by the way, I saw Monsieur Galoux this morning.

BLANCHETTE. [*Anxiously*] Isn't Lucie coming today?

ROUSSET. Yes. Don't cry now. [*With-*

out ill will] Hein, your Lucie! You can't do without her, can you? It's too bad you two can't get married.

MME. ROUSSET. You're a fine pair of friends, you two!

BLANCHETTE. [*Sincerely, but simply*] Yes, I am very fond of her.

ROUSSET. Her father said that he'd speak to the prefect about your position.

BLANCHETTE. [*Playing mechanically with her drawing*] Ah!

MME. ROUSSET. Don't throw your drawing away. You'll be very glad to have that when you're married; then you can hang it up in your room.

BLANCHETTE. When I get married — I'll have different sorts of pictures in my drawing-room.

ROUSSET. In your drawing-room?

BLANCHETTE. Yes, I want a drawing-room like Monsieur Galoux has. And then I want a Louis XV bedroom.

ROUSSET. Confound it! Listen to those dreams!

BLANCHETTE. Oh, I have many others.

MME. ROUSSET. What are they?

BLANCHETTE. There are so many. Then I'm going to live in Paris.

MME. ROUSSET. Why?

BLANCHETTE. I don't like peasants — I mean to say — I don't like the country. So I'm going to live in Paris in the winter, and then I shall travel.

ROUSSET. She's off! She's off! But that doesn't go with poor people.

BLANCHETTE. Oh, I know that. But I shall be rich.

ROUSSET. How's that?

BLANCHETTE. My husband will be.

MME. ROUSSET. And you think that he is coming here to find you, you a daughter of inn-keepers and peasants?

BLANCHETTE. Why not?

MME. ROUSSET. You're putting ideas into your head now that are bound to make you unhappy later.

BLANCHETTE. But why not! Madame Dubarry was a street merchant, and Rachel sang in courtyards —

MME. ROUSSET. I don't know anything about them, but —

ROUSSET. Let the child build her air castles if it gives her pleasure. I'd rather have her think of that than of unhappiness.

BLANCHETTE. Didn't Monsieur Galoux tell you what time Lucie was coming?

ROUSSET. No. [*Blanchette goes to the door and looks down the street*]

MME. ROUSSET. [*Softly to her husband*] Didn't you notice something?

ROUSSET. No.

MME. ROUSSET. Something that made me feel badly?

ROUSSET. No.

MME. ROUSSET. When she said what she was going to do when she was once married.

ROUSSET. Well?

MME. ROUSSET. She forgot us. She said nothing about us. One would think that from that moment on she was going to ignore us. Rousset — I'm afraid that our daughter is too smart for us.

ROUSSET. [*Laughing*] Come, come now, mother. You wouldn't want to go into the drawing-rooms with the fine ladies. Why mother, how would we look. We're only peasants. Would you like to make curtsies on a waxed floor, and wear forty-franc hats and silk dresses! Such things aren't for the like of us, you know. They're all right for Blanchette who knows how to talk and behave. All that we can ask of the good Lord is to be healthy, and to have enough work until the end of our days.

BLANCHETTE. [*Coming back and talking to herself*] She's not in sight yet, and she can't be late.

ROUSSET. [*Laughing*] Do you know what your good old mother was saying? She was saying that she wanted to sit in your gilded chairs and play the lady. How the gentlemen would make fun of you!

MME. ROUSSET. I didn't say that. All I said was that you did not say a word about us in your plans.

BLANCHETTE. I — I — yes — but — why of course — you would have a nice house in the country.

ROUSSET. There — you see, mother. And we'd spend the whole day in twirling our thumbs. Nothing — we'd do nothing at all. And I'll want a servant to bring me my handkerchief. [*He laughs*]

BLANCHETTE. That's right. But you had better go and change your clothes. Here you are at this late hour and not even shaved.

ROUSSET. Bah! I'm good enough to stay here.

BLANCHETTE. Lucie and perhaps Monsieur George are coming.

ROUSSET. Well he knows what peasants are.

BLANCHETTE. That makes no difference.

ROUSSET. You think so? Very well, I'm off. I'm going to make myself as handsome as a minister. [*He goes out left*]

BLANCHETTE. What time do you think Lucie is coming?

MME. ROUSSET. I don't know.

BLANCHETTE. [*Going to the door*] Not yet. But yes! There she is in the distance. With Monsieur George. [*Returning*] I'll have to hide this. [*She rolls up her drawing as well as the model*]

MME. ROUSSET. But no, leave it here so that Monsieur George will see it.

BLANCHETTE. No, no. [*Turning down her mother's cuffs*] Turn down your cuffs. Your apron. Take off your apron.

MME. ROUSSET. But they know very well that we are nothing but simple folks.

BLANCHETTE. That makes no difference. [*Giving her mother her drawing*] Here! Take these with you.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Going out left*] I'll be right back.

BLANCHETTE. So! [*She takes a small powder box from her pocket; on the inside of the lid there is a mirror. She powders her face slowly and also fixes her hair. To herself*] Oh, my good, sweet Lucie! How I love you! And George — George. It's nice to be able to say his name without adding, Monsieur. [*She goes to rear of stage*] Here they are. [*She runs out to meet them, and returns embracing Lucie.*

George, twenty-four years old, is in hunting costume, and carries a gun. He enters shortly afterwards.]

BLANCHETTE. [*Embracing Lucie*] How glad I am to see you!

LUCIE. And I too! How are you? George is going hunting. He brought me here.

BLANCHETTE. But you'll stay awhile, won't you?

LUCIE. Yes, George is going to call for me later.

BLANCHETTE. How fine!

GEORGE. And don't I get a how do you do?

BLANCHETTE. Yes, yes! How do you do, Monsieur George?

GEORGE. How are you, Mademoiselle Blanchette?

BLANCHETTE. I don't want to be called Blanchette. My name is Elise.

GEORGE. All right, Blanchette —

BLANCHETTE. Again!

GEORGE. Let me embrace you —

BLANCHETTE. Silly!

GEORGE. Just to say how do you do. You embraced my sister. [*He embraces her when she is not looking*]

BLANCHETTE. Ah, Monsieur George! Lucie, make him stop.

LUCIE. George, if you don't behave I'll tell mamma.

GEORGE. [*Imitating her*] I'll tell mamma.

LUCIE. Will you stop!

GEORGE. I'll leave Lucie in your care. I'm going to the beet fields to see if I can scare up a partridge; then I'll come back for her. Good-bye. [*He starts to go*]

MME. ROUSSET. [*Enters*] Monsieur George! [*To Blanchette*] How can you let him go like that without making him take something! [*To George*] Monsieur George. What can I offer you?

GEORGE. Nothing, thank you.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Taking him by the arm*] Come now! I'd like to see that. Come, come.

BLANCHETTE. But, mother. If Monsieur George does not want anything —

MME. ROUSSET. That's all right. You're going to drink something.

BLANCHETTE. [*Pulls her mother by the apron. Softly*] Mother!

MME. ROUSSET. Leave me alone! A big fellow like that! He's not afraid of a glass of brandy.

GEORGE. But I'm really not thirsty, I assure you.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Pouring out a glass of brandy*] One doesn't have to be thirsty to gulp that down. That'll give you a pair of legs

to stand on. [*She takes a piece of sugar in her fingers and puts it in the glass*] Now a little lump of sugar —

BLANCHETTE. Oh, mother, with your fingers!

MME. ROUSSET. Bah! My hands are clean.

GEORGE. That doesn't make any difference. [*He drinks*]

MME. ROUSSET. You see, he's not as finical as you.

GEORGE. By Jove, that's strong!

MME. ROUSSET. It feels good going down, hein! Good luck to you!

BLANCHETTE. One must never wish a hunter good luck. That always brings bad luck.

GEORGE. No, not any more. Well, I'll see you later.

MME. ROUSSET. Good-bye, Monsieur George. [*He goes*]

BLANCHETTE. [*Softly to her mother*] Why didn't you take off your apron?

MME. ROUSSET. Bah! There's no shame in wearing it.

BLANCHETTE. [*Bitterly*] And how often have I told you that it is not right to force people to take something when they don't want to!

MME. ROUSSET. Ah, I never thought of it.

BLANCHETTE. It becomes tiresome.

MME. ROUSSET. I'm going. Once I'm gone I won't make any more breaks.

BLANCHETTE. Mother, mother, you're not angry at me — because I told you that?

MME. ROUSSET. Of course not — I'm angry with myself. [*She goes*]

BLANCHETTE. [*To Lucie, who has been reading a paper*] Let me help you off with your things, my dear. Here, I'll take out that pin. [*She helps her remove her hat and veil*] How I love to wait on you! I wish I could be your maid.

LUCIE. No, it is I — I am very glad to see you again. [*Embracing her*] I have so many things to tell you!

BLANCHETTE. And I too!

LUCIE. Very well, begin!

BLANCHETTE. No, you begin!

LUCIE. Let's sit down first.

BLANCHETTE. Did you bring your work along?

LUCIE. Yes. I have a new stitch in crocheting.

BLANCHETTE. How fine! I hope you are going to show it to me.

LUCIE. Where shall we sit down?

BLANCHETTE. [*Pointing to the round table*] Over there.

LUCIE. No. Let's sit behind the counter.

BLANCHETTE. Oh, my dear!

LUCIE. But it'll be such fun. Just as if we were shop keepers.

BLANCHETTE. All right. [*They sit down*]

LUCIE. It's very comfortable.

BLANCHETTE. [*Looking at her*] Your hair isn't fixed as usual.

LUCIE. Oh, because I am not wearing it in a knot? It's not the style any longer.

BLANCHETTE. I'll have to change mine too. I like you better the way you have it now. Come now, what have you to tell me?

LUCIE. I? Nothing.

BLANCHETTE. But you just said —

LUCIE. Yes, but I have forgotten. And you?

BLANCHETTE. I've forgotten too. But no! It becomes terribly tiresome when you are not here. Just like at school. Do you remember?

LUCIE. Yes.

BLANCHETTE. You beat me sometimes.

LUCIE. I did?

BLANCHETTE. Don't excuse yourself: I was satisfied. Do you remember when we met?

LUCIE. No.

BLANCHETTE. You were a bit taller and stronger than I was. You came up to me one day without saying a word and threw the candies which my mother had brought me into the brook in the garden. I did not dare say a

word. Then you pinched me — very hard. I wept, but I was not angry at you. The next day you embraced me and brought me some dainties. I was very happy. And from then on, first you would torture me and then you would caress me. It was delicious!

LUCIE. You're an angel.

BLANCHETTE. I knew that you were rich. I had seen your father's carriage, and you appeared to me to belong to another world, so luxurious, so beautiful — and so far away from me.

LUCIE. Silly!

BLANCHETTE. But let's not talk of that any longer. Where have you been since the other day, and whom have you seen?

LUCIE. Oh, my dear, we spent an evening at the Count of Bellerive's.

BLANCHETTE. Really! And you spoke to him?

LUCIE. Why of course.

BLANCHETTE. How is he? Tall, blond, sparkling eyes, distinguished?

LUCIE. Not at all. He's short, fat, bald, and he stutters.

BLANCHETTE. Oh, how unfortunate!

LUCIE. Why unfortunate?

BLANCHETTE. Did you dance?

LUCIE. The entire evening. My dear, with

barons, viscounts, marquis. The marquis of Hautfort was there — you know.

BLANCHETTE. The one who is so rich?

LUCIE. Yes.

BLANCHETTE. You lucky girl! And did George dance?

LUCIE. No.

BLANCHETTE. Do you think he loves me?

LUCIE. I think so.

BLANCHETTE. How wonderful! Has he ever spoken to you about it?

LUCIE. No.

BLANCHETTE. And you have never mentioned it to him?

LUCIE. Never.

BLANCHETTE. That's all right then. Do you read the *feuilletons* in the *Indépendente?*

LUCIE. No.

BLANCHETTE. I read all that come into my hands. In this number of the *Indépendente* there are a young man and a young girl who are in love with each other, and who die, my dear, without ever telling each other about it. It is a very pretty story.

LUCIE. But you are not going to die, my dear, and you are going to marry my brother. I promised it to you and I will keep my word.

BLANCHETTE. How I love you. Just think,

if I become his wife, how happy we will be! We will never be separated!

LUCIE. You know that George pleaded his first case last Friday, and he won it. His first attempt was very much talked about, and a recorder prophesied a great future for him.

BLANCHETTE. He will be a deputy.

LUCIE. Oh, he can have that if he wants to when he comes of age. You understand with papa's position in the canton. And the country is republican.

BLANCHETTE. Hum! Radicalism. But that makes little difference. Once a deputy he will soon make himself known.

LUCIE. We will have a political salon.

BLANCHETTE. And a literary one! I can see myself there. My husband is standing at the fireplace, explaining his projects; he is surrounded by serious looking men who listen attentively to him. Both of us are in ball gowns.

LUCIE. I in black satin!

BLANCHETTE. You give advice, you expound your ideas; while I, surrounded by all the best literary talent, serve tea to —

[*The roadmender has entered during the latter part of this conversation, but the young girls have not seen him*]

BONENFANT. Well, Blanchette, when you

have finished chattering you can give Bibi a cup of coffee.

BLANCHETTE. [*A trifle piqued*] If you care to sit down, monsieur, I will call mamma.

BONENFANT. It sounds so funny for you to call me "monsieur" — But I don't want your mother, I want a cup of coffee.

BLANCHETTE. Right away. [*She goes to the door at the left*]

BONENFANT. [*Looking at Lucie*] Why, there's Mademoiselle Galoux. How d'ye do, mademoiselle?

LUCIE. Good day, my friend.

BLANCHETTE. [*Coming back*] My mother has gone out, monsieur. If you care to stop in again

BONENFANT. Can't *you* wait on me?

BLANCHETTE. No. I don't know where the things are.

BONENFANT. Ah! Well, I'll go to the other place. All the same, it seems too bad that your father sent you to school so long only to have you return so unwilling.

BLANCHETTE. I am sorry. Good day, monsieur.

BONENFANT. Good-bye. You're not very pleasant to people, I must say. [*To Lucie*] Good day, mademoiselle. Well, I'm off. [*He goes*]

LUCIE. Why didn't you give him his cup of coffee?

BLANCHETTE. I don't know where the things are. Besides I can't stand those peasants. [*Mme. Jules comes in*]

MME. JULES. How do you do, young ladies?

BLANCHETTE. Oh, they've come to call for you!

MME. JULES. Your father told me to tell you to come home as Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Durand have just come, and they are going again on the six o'clock train.

LUCIE. Ah, Léonie Durand? [*To Blanchette*] You knew her?

BLANCHETTE. Of course. I was jealous of her because she went to visit you.

LUCIE. You are a dear little fool. Well, I'm going. My hat, my gloves, my veil. [*She goes to the right where everything is*]

MME. JULES. By the way, Blanchette, please tell your mother that she made a mistake this morning: she gave me twelve eggs for a dozen instead of thirteen.

BLANCHETTE. All right.

LUCIE. Go ahead, Josephine, I'll follow you.

MME. JULES. Yes, miss. Keep well, Blanchette. [*She goes*]

LUCIE. Blanchette, will you tie my veil?

BLANCHETTE. Oh, my poor dear, I left you all alone.

LUCIE. [*While Blanchette is busy tying her veil*] Tell me. I don't like to have our cook be so intimate with you.

BLANCHETTE. If you tell her —

LUCIE. It is for you to tell her.

BLANCHETTE. Very well.

LUCIE. Good-bye. [*They embrace*]

BLANCHETTE. You'll come soon again?

LUCIE. As soon as possible. Good-bye. [*She goes*]

[*Blanchette stays a moment at the door watching Lucie. Then she comes back, looking sad. She looks about her for a while, as if she were looking at the walls for the first time, and sighs.*]

BLANCHETTE. Oh, dear, how tiresome it is here! [*She sits down at the counter*] Where is my novel? [*She takes it out of the drawer and starts reading. Rousset comes in in a new blouse. He gets his pipe*]

ROUSSET. [*Lighting his pipe*] Well, here I am. Do I look all right now?

BLANCHETTE. [*Without looking up from her book*] Yes.

ROUSSET. Was any one here?

BLANCHETTE. No.

ROUSSET. You saw Mademoiselle Galoux?

BLANCHETTE. [*After a silence, and then as if from a dream*] Did I see Lucie? Yes.

ROUSSET. You might stop reading a bit

when I speak to you. All you answer is yes and no — or you don't answer at all.

BLANCHETTE. But I answered you.

ROUSSET. That's no way of answering. One speaks.

BLANCHETTE. But I've nothing to tell you.

ROUSSET. Oh, come now! What did Mademoiselle Galoux have to tell you?

BLANCHETTE. Nothing that would be of any interest to you.

ROUSSET. By the way, you know mother Dufour's horse. Well it died this morning. [*Silence*] Well, did you hear what I said?

BLANCHETTE. Of course — Madame Dufour's horse died.

ROUSSET. Well?

BLANCHETTE. What do you expect me to do?

ROUSSET. Well, there's one thing I'll tell you, and that is that all those novels are turning your head. And one of these days I'll stop your reading altogether. You believe all that is told in them. From now on I'll only allow you to read good books, like travels.

BLANCHETTE. [*Aside*] Thank you.

ROUSSET. Let me see what you are reading.

BLANCHETTE. [*Puts the novel in a drawer*] It's something that was loaned to me. There! I'll not read any longer. [*She picks up her crocheting, and sits at the center table*]

ROUSSET. You had better not.

[*Auguste Morillon and his father enter. They are dressed in their best clothes*]

ROUSSET. Here is père Morillon and his lad. I tell you, those two are never separated.

MORILLON. And I tell you that there are very few fathers and sons who understand one another as beautifully as we do. Isn't it so, Auguste?

AUGUSTE. Yes, papa.

MORILLON. I haven't a better friend in the world than him, and he hasn't a better friend than me. We work all during the week, and on Sundays we make a little excursion. In the evening, after dinner, we sit at home, our elbows on the table, opposite to each other. We each smoke our pipes and talk of things of the past, and we also build many air castles.

ROUSSET. You never find it tiresome?

MORILLON. No. He is smarter than I am. A little — not much. He tells me what he has read in his books; he reads the paper to me, and there you are!

ROUSSET. Ah, you are lucky. But come now, let's have our game of dominos. [*They sit down at right*]

MORILLON. I'm ready.

ROUSSET. Give us a bit to drink, and also the dominos.

[*Blanchette starts to rise*]

AUGUSTE. [*Who has been watching her*] Don't you bother. I've nothing to do; so let me get the things.

[*After getting the things he returns to Blanchette and watches her work*]

MORILLON. I've something to say to you, père Rousset.

ROUSSET. About the land?

MORILLON. Yes.

AUGUSTE. [*To Blanchette*] You're sad.

BLANCHETTE. I'm terribly bored.

ROUSSET. Well, what is it?

MORILLON. There is a way of getting that land — and for nothing!

ROUSSET. For nothing?

MORILLON. Aren't you thinking of marrying off Blanchette?

ROUSSET. Oh! marry off a girl like that! A smart girl like that! A lass who has her teacher's degree! Mademoiselle Galoux, who is the daughter of a smart man, she couldn't get the degree!

MORILLLON. You don't mean it!

ROUSSET. She was — [*To Blanchette*] How do you say it? She tripped up on her oral examination.

MORILLON. Hein!

ROUSSET. [*Playing*] Here's the black one.

MORILLON. Four.

ROUSSET. Haven't got it.

MORILLON. The four again.

ROUSSET. Still haven't got it.

AUGUSTE. [*To Blanchette*] Do you remember what friends we used to be?

BLANCHETTE. Yes. And I used to call you my little husband.

MORILLON. The three, and then the three again. Domino!

ROUSSET. You haven't any up your sleeves, have you?

MORILLON. Take a look.

ROUSSET. The game is mine.

AUGUSTE. Aren't you thinking of getting married?

BLANCHETTE. I? No.

AUGUSTE. Ah! Well, I guess that father and I might as well have remained at home.

BLANCHETTE. Why?

AUGUSTE. Do you know what my father came to ask of yours?

BLANCHETTE. No.

AUGUSTE. Well, he came to ask for your hand — for me. If he had agreed, what would you have said?

BLANCHETTE. I am very fond of you, but —

MORILLON. I'd like to speak about my land, père Rousset.

ROUSSET. Your land? What land?

MORILLON. Let's not speak of it any more. Three.

ROUSSET. Five. No, but what land?

MORILLON. No, no, I've said nothing. Four.

ROUSSET. What?

MORILLON. Two.

ROUSSET. Is it about that David land that you want to speak?

MORILLON. I? No.

ROUSSET. That's a poor bit of land.

MORILLON. Poor, my land!

ROUSSET. Oh, it's a good place to find pebbles!

MORILLON. Pebbles! Pebbles!

ROUSSET. Well, how much'll you sell me your precious bit for?

MORILLON. You'd like it, hein?

ROUSSET. I! Six — and, worse luck, six again — domino!

MORILLON. Aren't there any under the table?

ROUSSET. No, look!

MORILLON. I'll never sell my land.

ROUSSET. Ah!

MORILLON. I'll give it to Auguste perhaps when he gets married.

ROUSSET. I see.

MORILLON. Yes. Yes, to have my land one must have a daughter to marry off.

ROUSSET. I understand.

MORILLON. Yes. You don't want to marry off Blanchette?

ROUSSET. Ah! Ah!

MORILLON. They'd make a nice couple.

ROUSSET. Who?

MORILLON. Those two.

ROUSSET. I'll not say no.

MORILLON. Well, now. Will you give me Blanchette for my son?

ROUSSET. Hein? Blanchette — for — ah, no! Ah, no! At that price she'd still be too good for your bit of land. Ah, here comes the wife. Tell père Morillon who wants Blanchette for his son.

MME. ROUSSET. Ah, no! We didn't let our lass go to school until she was twenty only to marry her to one of the likes of us.

ROUSSET. You hear, père Morillon, you'll have to come again when you're a millionaire.

AUGUSTE. Come, father, let's go!

ROUSSET. What! Why go? There's no reason to get angry. We're not any the worse friends for that.

MORILLON. That's all right!

ROUSSET. Père Morillon, that is not possible. You must understand that she's too educated for you.

MORILLON. All right. Keep your daughter

for a marquis. For the ill that I wish you I hope that you'll never repent having made a lady of her. Good-bye everybody.

ROUSSET. We repent! We'll see, my old friend.

MORILLON. Yes, we'll see.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

The scene is the same as in the first act. April.

Mme. Rousset is sprinkling sand under the tables. Blanchette is at the round table working on the account books.

BLANCHETTE. And do you know how much that makes in all? Two hundred and seventy-five francs. Not one sou more.

MME. ROUSSET. That's quite a lot.

BLANCHETTE. A lot! You think that's a lot! Do you know what you are getting for those two hundred and seventy-five francs? Here it is itemized: "To painting on the front of the house these words, '*Café de Cérès,*' fifty francs."

MME. ROUSSET. Why call it "*Café de Cérès*" when our name is Rousset?

BLANCHETTE. Ceres was the goddess of agriculture. So you see it's the same as calling it "*Café de l'Agriculture,*" only this is much finer.

MME. ROUSSET. Will it be to any use?

BLANCHETTE. [*Correcting her*] Will it be *of* any use?

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, will it be *of* any use?

BLANCHETTE. I have no doubt that it will.

What gives value to an establishment? Its name. You can be sure that that plays a great part.

MME. ROUSSET. But —

BLANCHETTE. No; no, no, don't argue! You don't know! I again say that this expenditure is necessary.

MME. ROUSSET. All right, I consent.

BLANCHETTE. Then there is the painting of the interior which will cost eighty-five francs. That is absolutely necessary.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes. But we usually get along with five francs worth of whitewash.

BLANCHETTE. I know that very well. But I want allegorical paintings with Greek borders, like in the cities.

MME. ROUSSET. I'll be afraid to come in here when it's all so beautiful.

BLANCHETTE. Then — a beer pump for thirty francs.

MME. ROUSSET. But no one drinks beer here.

BLANCHETTE. If we carry good beer people will drink it. Then an ice-cream freezer for one hundred and ten francs.

MME. ROUSSET. Ice cream! Ice cream! The kind they had at Symphorien's wedding?

BLANCHETTE. Yes.

MME. ROUSSET. But no one has ever asked for that.

BLANCHETTE. Because we didn't have any. And besides, that will be a good advertisement. When people ask one another: "Which café shall we visit this evening?" they will say, "Why, the *Café de Cérès;* it's the nicest; and it is the only one where they serve ice cream."

MME. ROUSSET. But we'll never sell any.

BLANCHETTE. That makes little difference.

MME. ROUSSET. Well, since we'll never have to use this ice-cream freezer we might as well not buy one. That won't stop us from saying that we have one just the same.

BLANCHETTE. And if Monsieur George Galoux and his friends come one day and ask for some, how will we look?

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, but —

BLANCHETTE. Come, mamma! Let me make our fortune. The government is making me wait for the position that it owes me. All the better! I am consecrating my instruction and knowledge to transform this tavern into a café. I know what I owe to both of you; I know the sacrifices that you have had to make, and I do not want to wait any longer in order to repay you. I am going to make you rich.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes. [*A pause*] Your father would rather see you in a position.

BLANCHETTE. Father! Let him be! When the chemical fertilizer that I have had him put

on his land shows its power he'll not want me to leave.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, but up to the present nothing has happened in spite of that fertilizer of yours, which cost more than all our manure.

BLANCHETTE. Nothing has happened! And why? Because we have had no rain. The ingredients have to be dissolved by rain so that the azote and phosphate can get at the roots.

MME. ROUSSET. But it rained last night.

BLANCHETTE. Did it? Are you sure? How fine! It rained! Now you'll see father return all radiant. I tell you that will have made the wheat grow. [*She goes to the door*]

MME. ROUSSET. What's the matter with you, the way you're always rushing to the door? Are you waiting for something?

BLANCHETTE. Yes. Something that I bought in town.

MME. ROUSSET. What is it?

BLANCHETTE. My gift for father. You know that today is his birthday.

MME. ROUSSET. What are you giving him?

BLANCHETTE. A lamp.

MME. ROUSSET. But we have one already.

BLANCHETTE. This is a lamp with a column. High as that! That's the way they are making them now-a-days. Lucie and I picked it out. You'll see it.

MME. ROUSSET. But it's probably too handsome for us.

BLANCHETTE. No, it isn't. Mamma, please remember once and for all that we have to elevate ourselves. I have told you, haven't I, that it is Lucie's and my intention for me to marry her brother George?

MME. ROUSSET. Don't think of such impossibilities! Do you for one moment think that Monsieur Galoux will let his son marry a tavern keeper's daughter?

BLANCHETTE. No, not a tavern keeper's daughter; but he'll not object to a merchant's daughter. Of course it is entirely in your hands whether you want to be rich within three years from now.

MME. ROUSSET. Within three years! That is madness, my poor girl.

BLANCHETTE. You'll see. Nothing speaks better than figures. Isn't that true? Well! Listen to me. There is a population of two thousand in our village, isn't there?

MME. ROUSSET. Two thousand three hundred.

BLANCHETTE. Let's call it two thousand. Statistics show us that each individual consumes at least twenty centimes worth of drink a day, either in wine, cider, or something else. And you will admit that with our projected

improvements we will have at least one quarter of the people trading here. That makes five hundred. At twenty centimes per person, that makes one hundred francs a day. Counting only on twenty per cent net profit that would make twenty francs a day, at the very least, that we could pocket; making seven thousand francs a year, or twenty thousand francs in three years.

MME. ROUSSET. You're off again!

BLANCHETTE. Well, there is no contesting my calculations. They are based on authentic figures; on the population, and on individual consumption. They are exact; ab-so-lute-ly exact.

MME. ROUSSET. I simply can't believe that we'll be rich so soon.

BLANCHETTE. Why not! The time has passed where it takes twenty years to make a fortune. We are living in the present; we have to keep up with our times.

MME. ROUSSET. I do what I can "to keep up with our times," as you say. Even if they do make fun of me when I say the words that you have taught me, or when I wear the hats that you make for me, my poor Blanchette.

BLANCHETTE. What's that? I have told you so often not to call me Blanchette.

MME. ROUSSET. That's true. The other

day, at the Gaillards', when speaking of their mother, who is always happy, I said that she was an optim —

BLANCHETTE. Optimist.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, optimist. You see, I pronounce it nicely now.

BLANCHETTE. Yes, well?

MME. ROUSSET. They told me that I did not know what I was talking about; that the word I used meant some one who looked after one's eyes.

BLANCHETTE. Oculist! Ah, how ignorant they are!

MME. ROUSSET. But you are sure that *you* are not wrong?

BLANCHETTE. Why, of course!

MME. ROUSSET. Yesterday, for mass, I put on my hat. You know the little one that is covered with nothing but flowers and holes.

BLANCHETTE. Yes. Well?

MME. ROUSSET. Every one made fun of me. I'll not wear it again.

BLANCHETTE. And why! Does one have to pay attention to jealous and stupid women!

[*A man comes in with a package*]

THE MAN. Mademoiselle Elise Rousset.

BLANCHETTE. I am Mademoiselle Rousset. What have you got there?

THE MAN. Books.

BLANCHETTE. But haven't you something else? A lamp?

THE MAN. A lamp — a very tall lamp — is that for you? I thought it was for the manor. I left it in the wagon.

BLANCHETTE. It is for us.

THE MAN. I'll get it.

BLANCHETTE. Very well. [*He leaves*]

MME. ROUSSET. What are all these books?

BLANCHETTE. Oh, books that I need. [*Reading the titles*] On Intensive Agriculture. — On the Use of Agricultural Machinery. — The Debt to Agriculture. — The Fortune Made by the Use of Chemical Fertilizers. — The Product of the Soil. — A Treatise on Political Economy.

MME. ROUSSET. You're going to read all that?

BLANCHETTE. And you'll be the one who'll profit by it.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Who has found the bill*] But there's some mistake here! It's not possible. This isn't your bill. Thirty-two francs!

BLANCHETTE. [*Looking at it*] Thirty-two francs — yes, that is a lot. You're right. [*She puts the bill in her pocket*] They made a mistake. I'll speak to them about it when I go by. You are right.

MME. ROUSSET. Hide it well so that your father will not see it. He'll be back soon.

BLANCHETTE. That's true. But he will know what effects the fertilizer has had on his wheat — and he will be in good humor. But I'll hide it just the same. What a fine birthday he'll have: a beautiful gift — my plan for his fortune, and his wheat hardier and thicker than any one else's in the district.

MME. ROUSSET. Here he is.

[*Rousset enters. He looks very angry. His blouse is drawn up, as he has his hands in his pockets. His head is bare. He enters without saying a word, goes across the entire room, sits down in a corner, and fills his pipe. A long pause.*]

MME. ROUSSET. [*Softly to her daughter*] He's not in good humor.

BLANCHETTE. [*Also softly*] It's because he hasn't been out to see his wheat.

MME. ROUSSET. Perhaps.

BLANCHETTE. [*Aloud*] It rained last night, father. You didn't go out to see your wheat, did you?

ROUSSET. To the devil with everything! Don't talk to me! Leave me alone. Yes, I have been to see my wheat.

BLANCHETTE. Well? Didn't the fertilizer work?

ROUSSET. Yes, your rubbish worked. All is lost, burned, just as if some one had poured vitriol over it.

BLANCHETTE. It's not possible.

ROUSSET. What?

BLANCHETTE. I say that it's not possible. Science is never wrong.

ROUSSET. And I tell you that all is lost.

BLANCHETTE. It can't be.

ROUSSET. This is too much! I have just seen it. All is lost — my wheat and your eight hundred kilos of *fertilizer*.

BLANCHETTE. [*Nervous*] Eight hundred kilos! I told you to put on eight hundred kilos?

ROUSSET. Well!

BLANCHETTE. Wait a moment. [*She looks among her papers on the counter*]

ROUSSET. Ah, you can calculate! They teach you fine things at school! At times I wonder if it had not been better to bring you up as your father and mother were brought up.

BLANCHETTE. [*Who has not been listening*] I made a mistake of one zero. You should have only used eighty kilos. Next year you can try it with eighty kilos.

ROUSSET. Ah, yes! Of course! Your *fertilizer!* I'll cultivate my land as my parents did, and all your *fertilizers* can go to the devil!

Because all such things are products of the devil, nothing but underhand dealings about which I know nothing. People ate bread before *fertilizers* were invented, didn't they? I don't want any of your *ingredients.*

BLANCHETTE. The old-fashioned way! Always the old-fashioned way!

ROUSSET. Yes, the old-fashioned way. If I hadn't listened to you I would still have my wheat, and I wouldn't have spent, I don't know how much.

BLANCHETTE. How funny you are! The fertilizer —

ROUSSET. Now that's enough. I don't want to hear any more about it. Luckily, I only put it on a small corner — just to see how it would work. [*A pause*] You haven't yet received a letter from the government giving you a position?

BLANCHETTE. No.

ROUSSET. Well, people are making fun of us.

BLANCHETTE. But, father; I have already explained to you —

ROUSSET. That's all right. If I were in your place I would be ashamed to keep on being fed for nothing. [*He goes to the right and begins to whittle a piece of wood*]

BLANCHETTE. There's nothing to do! I have not slept a week now just because I've been

racking my brain to find a way to pay you what I owe.

ROUSSET. Yes, you "rack," but you are praying to God all the while not to find anything.

BLANCHETTE. [*Timidly*] But I have found something.

ROUSSET. [*Still whittling*] Ah! So you have found something! Well! Speak. If you have found something, speak.

BLANCHETTE. [*Without assurance*] We have to get trade by making this a real restaurant. Clean the interior. Paint, on the outside, in large letters, *Café de Cérès.*

ROUSSET. Some more of your *fertilizers?*

BLANCHETTE. No, father.

MME. ROUSSET. That is the same as if it were *Café de l'Agriculture.*

ROUSSET. You know that, mother! Ah! And after that?

BLANCHETTE. Buy a beer pump — an ice-cream freezer. Of course, we could do without them.

ROUSSET. And why not marble tables and wicker chairs right away?

BLANCHETTE. We could make seven thousand francs a year. I figured it up.

ROUSSET. You must have made a mistake

of several zeros, like you did with your *fertilizer*. Is that your plan?

BLANCHETTE. Yes, father. But if you don't let me explain, you'll never know —

ROUSSET. Explain — explain. I'm nothing but a workingman and don't have to make a fortune. All I ask is that the good Lord give me enough work until the end of my days — that, and also that you get a position soon.

BLANCHETTE. I assure you that if I showed you my figures —

ROUSSET. Leave me alone. [*He has finished whittling his piece of wood*] Do you know what I am going to do with this bit of wood?

BLANCHETTE. No.

ROUSSET. Did they teach you what to do to avert lightning?

BLANCHETTE. Yes. A lightning-rod communicating with a well or the ground. The point attracts the lightning, and the iron is the conductor.

ROUSSET. All wrong. You take a piece of wood from a tree on which a man hanged himself the year before. This piece comes from the tree where they found Pierre Lariquot. You whittle your wood just one week before Good Friday; the following Sunday you soak it in the blood of a black hen, and you stick it in the middle of the garden.

Mme. Rousset. And it's true that a place where that has been done has never been struck.

Blanchette. How can you believe such nonsense? Why they are the last vestiges of another age.

Rousset. The — what?

Blanchette. It's superstition.

Rousset. The old people of our time knew more about it than all of your books. My grandfather taught me that. And he got it from his grandfather — [*With veneration*] who was a shepherd.

Blanchette. Lightning, thunder, that's all electricity. We know how to conduct it, we know how to make use of it. — How do you want a bit of wood? — [*Laughing*] With a speck of intelligence — Come, father. Your stick whittled on a Friday — and soaked in the blood of a black hen. [*She laughs*] Why, it's ridiculous. A hen or a rooster, did you say? Ah, I don't think you know yourself.

Rousset. You are making fun of me. What proof have you that your books are right?

Blanchette. Well —

Rousset. My parents taught me that; I loved them, and I believed all they told me — and it would grieve me to find out now that they were wrong.

Blanchette. However —

MME. ROUSSET. That's all right. That's all right. Don't argue. [*A pause*] Monsieur Galoux asked for his last month's bill. Everything is written down. All you have to do, Blanchette, is to add it up.

BLANCHETTE. There is a mistake.

ROUSSET. I suppose you forgot to put something down.

BLANCHETTE. On the contrary.

ROUSSET. Well then, what are you talking about?

BLANCHETTE. I'm going to erase it.

ROUSSET. Will you be quiet? Who asked you anything? Isn't it enough that you have made me lose my wheat without spoiling my profits?

BLANCHETTE. Dishonest profits never bring any good.

ROUSSET. I suppose you learned that at school. Well, what is there in the bill that troubles you?

BLANCHETTE. The milk and the eggs are charged here on the 6th, 7th, and 8th. But Lucie and her parents were in the city on those days.

ROUSSET. That's true, it's a mistake — but it's not for us to notice it. [*He continues whittling*]

BLANCHETTE. I'll rub it out.

ROUSSET. Leave it, I tell you.

BLANCHETTE. No, I'll not leave it. It's not honest. Why, how would we look?

MME. ROUSSET. [*Trying to console her*] Be at your ease! They never look over our bills.

BLANCHETTE. All the more reason not to deceive them!

ROUSSET. What difference can it make to Monsieur Galoux whether he pays ten francs more or less?

BLANCHETTE. But it's stealing.

MME. ROUSSET. Not at all. When one takes something from a richer person than oneself it is not stealing.

BLANCHETTE. Very well then, I prefer paying the difference from my own pocket. Thus you will lose nothing.

ROUSSET. Your own pocket! Your own pocket! You're pretty proud with your own pocket. Where does the money come from that is in your own pocket? Do you earn it?

BLANCHETTE. When I get my position I'll pay it back.

ROUSSET. When you get your position! That'll be in some week that has four Thursdays. If one had only told me that your degree and nothing amounted to the same thing!

BLANCHETTE. It's not my fault.

ROUSSET. Finally, instead of bringing in

money, you are an expense. You make me lose my wheat, and besides, you want to stop me from making a living with your millionaire's scruples.

BLANCHETTE. But I ask nothing better than to work. Get me a position. Put me in a store.

ROUSSET. No one would want you. You can't do anything with your fingers. And you're too particular to go into commerce.

BLANCHETTE. Find me something else —

ROUSSET. What? Tell me, what? You have ideas of great things — ideas that you get from your novels. All your reading has turned your head. You're good for nothing but spending money. For that you are perfect. If you had Rothschild's fortune, you'd soon squander it. But for that which is — [*A man enters*] What have you there?

THE MAN. It's for you, père Rousset. It's a lamp, and a beauty at that. It comes from the *Panier fleuri*. [*He takes the lamp out of a basket*] It was wrapped up in straw with some other things. My Lord, it's big enough, too. I thought it belonged up at the manor.

BLANCHETTE. Yes, it's for us. [*To her father*] That is my birthday gift for you.

THE MAN. If the address hadn't been on it I'd never believed it was for you.

ROUSSET. [*After a pause*] Why not? Just because I haven't a great coat do I always have to read by candle light?

THE MAN. I know very well that you attend to business. That's true. Still you are lucky to have a young lady who sends you such lovely presents for your birthday.

ROUSSET. Yes. She has good taste.

THE MAN. [*Who has finished mounting the lamp*] Look. It makes one think one is in a drawing-room.

ROUSSET. That's true. It's very pretty.

MME. ROUSSET. And it is so ornamental.

THE MAN. Is your daughter still waiting for her position?

ROUSSET. She has it. But we are in no hurry to get rid of her. The government will have to wait.

THE MAN. Indeed! Well, good-bye, père Rousset.

BLANCHETTE. [*Giving him a tip*] Here is something for you.

THE MAN. Thank you, miss. [*He leaves*]

ROUSSET. How much did you give him?

BLANCHETTE. Two sous.

ROUSSET. You should have given him a drink instead.

MME. ROUSSET. But it's the same price.

ROUSSET. Yes, but we'd have made our profit.

MME. ROUSSET. It doesn't make any difference.

BLANCHETTE. Father, I wish you many happy returns of the day. [*She embraces him*] You like the lamp?

ROUSSET. Yes, but why is it perched so high up in the air?

BLANCHETTE. It's prettier that way.

ROUSSET. It's stupidly conceived. You know, we don't have to light up the walls. When I have a lamp I want to use it to see down here — on the table, when I read my paper, or play dominos.

MME. ROUSSET. But if it's the style!

ROUSSET. What the deuce do I care about style? Are you in style? There's no need of using kerosene to light up the ceiling.

BLANCHETTE. Then you do not like it? Well it can be exchanged.

ROUSSET. No. Wait a bit — I'll fix it. [*He takes the lamp and goes out left*]

BLANCHETTE. What's he going to do with it?

MME. ROUSSET. He's probably going to fill it.

BLANCHETTE. [*Looking out of the door*] He's taking it into the yard.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, the kerosene is in the shed.

BLANCHETTE. That's true. [*A pause*] Oh, heavens! how tiresome it gets here.

MME. ROUSSET. I ask myself what you lack. Do I perchance find it tiresome?

BLANCHETTE. Oh, it's not the same thing. No one loves me. My father makes me sad, and galls me. It's not my fault if I cannot earn anything. I studied well at school. I have my degree. I have done my duty! You see the rest. I am used harshly and treated like a stranger. No one understands me.

MME. ROUSSET. Well, what do you want us to do more for you? But, I repeat, what is the matter with you? Aren't you happy?

BLANCHETTE. No. Far from it. There are nights that I do not get to sleep until dawn, after having wept — my head buried in my pillow so that no one will hear me. I feel myself so alone, so abandoned. Neither of you love me as I should be loved.

MME. ROUSSET. Come now! Come now! Ah, your father was right, if you didn't know how to read or write you'd not invent such silly things.

BLANCHETTE. Invent!

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, invent. Can you tell me why you are crying? Now tell me.

BLANCHETTE. I don't know. I am bored — everything is sad about me. I am bored.

MME. ROUSSET. Always the same refrain: I am bored! Work, and you'll not be bored.

BLANCHETTE. You do not love me, mother. Yes, yes, I know. Yes, you love me very much. But just see. There are times when I think I am going mad, and when I feel myself capable of doing the most horrible things. Love me a lot — I weep so often when no one is around.

MME. ROUSSET. My poor Blanchette, you are sad. But I too have troubles and a great many. I am no more the mother that you would like; and you are not the daughter that I used to love so much. They changed you down there. And we understand each other but seldom. You talk of weeping when no one is about. But I too have often wept in the corner all on your account.

BLANCHETTE. My poor mamma. On my account!

MME. ROUSSET. Yes. I never told you that. But every time I went to see you at school I returned with an aching heart.

BLANCHETTE. But why?

MME. ROUSSET. Ah, those visits! I shall never forget them. When I used to come into the parlor and see you playing with your little friends — you were gay, happy. But when they told you that I had come you lost your

gaiety all of a sudden; your face became hard, and you wore a bored expression, and I soon realized that my visits caused you a great deal of annoyance.

BLANCHETTE. You are wrong, mamma.

MME. ROUSSET. No. When I was speaking you used to look me over from head to foot — you compared my appearance with the mothers of your little friends — and — I never understood it until later — you were ashamed of me.

BLANCHETTE. Mamma! No! I beg you —

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, yes. I know it. I'm stupid, and that is the reason why I didn't notice it sooner. I used to tell you what was happening here at home, thinking that it would interest you, and you used to interrupt me to say: — "Oh, mamma! You have no gloves on!" or "There are holes in your gloves." And I, so happy at seeing you, and thinking that you were also happy, would reply, "Bah! That makes no difference! If any one doesn't like them they can buy me a new pair." Foolish, wasn't it? Then you would cautiously look around to see whether any one had heard, and then you would tell me not to speak so loud. You wished that I wouldn't come again.

BLANCHETTE. I ask forgiveness!

MME. ROUSSET. But you are not bad.

However — one day! — how I suffered! You thought I had gone — one of your friends asked you: "Was that woman your governess?" And you did not dare answer.

BLANCHETTE. Forgive me!

MME. ROUSSET. I felt so badly — and as I did not want to say anything to your father I told him that I had lost one hundred francs. He flew into a terrible fury and almost beat me.

BLANCHETTE. [*Falling on her neck*] Mother! Mother! I beg of you! Don't speak of it any more! Never! Never!

MME. ROUSSET. [*Holding her in her arms*] Now you see that I too have had my sorrow, my poor Blanchette. Don't cry! It wasn't your fault. But it made me feel so badly.

[*They both weep. A pause. Rousset enters carrying the lamp. He has sawed off the column, and it is now the size of an ordinary lamp. It is very ugly. The women separate*]

ROUSSET. Now she's fixed.

BLANCHETTE. Oh, what have you done?

ROUSSET. I removed the part that didn't belong there. Now we'll have light on the table.

BLANCHETTE. [*To her mother*] My beautiful lamp!

MME. ROUSSET. It's better this way.

BLANCHETTE. [*Viewing it from a distance*] You think so?

ROUSSET. [*To Blanchette*] Aren't you satisfied?

BLANCHETTE. Oh, yes. [*She takes the lamp and starts to go out left*]

MME. ROUSSET. You're taking it away?

BLANCHETTE. I'm going to fill it. [*She leaves. Immediately there is the noise of broken glass*]

ROUSSET. [*Rushes out left*] Ah! The little devil! She broke it on purpose! [*Outside*] I'm sure that you did it on purpose! Didn't you do it on purpose?

BLANCHETTE. [*Outside*] Yes, I did it on purpose! Yes, I did. That will teach you a lesson.

ROUSSET. [*Outside*] So, that will teach me a lesson, will it? Well, here! Take that! That will teach you a lesson. [*One hears him strike Blanchette, and she cries out*]

MME. ROUSSET. [*Rushes out*] Come, Rousset! That's enough now!

ROUSSET. [*Enters, holding Blanchette by the arm. She is not weeping*] Do you still say that you did it on purpose?

BLANCHETTE. Yes. I did it on purpose to punish you for your stupidity.

ROUSSET. [*Raising his hand*] You want another?

MME. ROUSSET. [*Interposing*] Rousset!

BLANCHETTE. [*Braving him*] You can beat as much as you like. You can kill me. I don't care! I'll not give in to you.

ROUSSET. Say that again.

BLANCHETTE. You are hurting me — with your big hands.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Trying to separate them*] Blanchette! Be quiet! Do you hear me! Rousset, stop that now.

BLANCHETTE. No, I'll not be quiet. You haven't the right to beat me. We shall see. I'll put in a complaint. The law will not permit you to beat me.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Exasperated*] Will you be quiet!

BLANCHETTE. No!

MME. ROUSSET. Will you be quiet!

BLANCHETTE. No!

MME. ROUSSET. [*Furious*] You shall obey me, you little devil! Or —

BLANCHETTE. [*Crying out with pain*] You are hurting me.

ROUSSET. Ah, let her alone! I'll go take a bit of a walk.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, that's best. [*She pushes her roughly away*] I don't know what I'll do to her. [*Rousset leaves*]

MME. ROUSSET. You see; you've put your

father into a rage. He'll go and drink now and come back worse than ever.

BLANCHETTE. You might as well kill me right away. Then you'll be rid of me.

MME. ROUSSET. You are nothing but a fool!

BLANCHETTE. Thank you!

MME. ROUSSET. A fool! In spite of all your learning.

BLANCHETTE. Go on.

MME. ROUSSET. You'll never be any good.

BLANCHETTE. That's still nicer!

MME. ROUSSET. But I tell you that this will not go on, and as long as you are here you'll obey. Do you hear! [*She goes out left*]

BLANCHETTE. [*Alone*] If only some one would come and take me away from this hell! I should like to leave here, go to the city, and do anything. I'd be better off anywhere than here where my parents detest me, and to whom I am less than a stranger.

[*Lucie and her father enter*]

LUCIE. How do you do, Elise?

BLANCHETTE. Oh, it's you! How glad I am to see you!

GALOUX. Good morning —

BLANCHETTE. Oh, good morning, Monsieur Galoux. What good wind brings you here? [*To Lucie*] You are well?

LUCIE. You look as if you had been weeping!

BLANCHETTE. It's nothing. You are very kind to bring Lucie to see me. Although my parents are very good I get terribly bored waiting.

GALOUX. I bring you news about your position.

BLANCHETTE. Good news?

GALOUX. Yes, my dear. There were two thousand candidates ahead of you, I have used all my influence, and now —

BLANCHETTE. Yes?

GALOUX. Now you are only the five hundred and fourteenth.

BLANCHETTE. That means — I'll have to wait how long?

GALOUX. Perhaps six months, perhaps a year.

BLANCHETTE. Listen, Monsieur Galoux. I do not want to do a lot of begging, but I'll tell you this: if I have to wait even six weeks, much less six months, or a year, there's no use in bothering about me any longer.

GALOUX. Why is that?

BLANCHETTE. Because I shall be dead by that time.

GALOUX. Girls at your age speak a lot about death, but that's as far as they ever get.

BLANCHETTE. I'm not a girl like the others.

I cannot tell you everything, Monsieur Galoux, so you will have to imagine the rest. Although my parents are very good, I repeat that I suffer a great deal here, a great deal. And my parents feel badly to see that I am idle. We get excited, become unjust toward one another, and a time comes when life is no longer bearable together. We are now at that stage.

GALOUX. I see! I see! But do not get discouraged. I can see nothing — unless —

LUCIE. Unless —

GALOUX. Heavens, it's hard to state it. Would you consent to be a companion to a young girl of your age who is preparing for the examinations which you have just passed?

BLANCHETTE. With all my heart.

GALOUX. Even if the girl in question were Lucie?

LUCIE. [*Embracing him*] Oh, papa, how good you are!

BLANCHETTE. But that would be paradise.

GALOUX. You would be paid —

BLANCHETTE. Let's not talk of that — my board and lodging would be all that I asked.

GALOUX. Well, we'll see.

LUCIE. What joy!

BLANCHETTE. How wonderful!

GALOUX. One thing more. I ask three days' patience of you, my dear — three days is

not too much. During that time I will go to the prefect once more, and if I am not successful, all you have to do is ask your father whether our arrangements are satisfactory. If they are, I'll come to speak to him, and the thing will be settled. But don't speak to any one about this.

BLANCHETTE. I promise not to.

GALOUX. Now let us speak of something else. Tomorrow Monsieur de Hautfort is giving a hunt. We are not going to be in it, but we are going to be spectators.

LUCIE. There is room for one more in our carriage.

BLANCHETTE. How good of you! But I have nothing to wear.

LUCIE. You can come anyway.

GALOUX. We will be four: George, Lucie, you and I — I counted on seeing your parents so that I could ask them.

BLANCHETTE. Mamma will be back very soon. Is a hunt nice?

LUCIE. Yes, very nice. And then there will be a lot of style.

BLANCHETTE. But don't you think it's awfully barbarous? The poor beast that is hunted all day.

LUCIE. But it is one of the finest pleasures there is.

BLANCHETTE. I know that; but it seems to me that the women should form some sort of a league of pity in order to stop the men from being so cruel. I ask your pardon, sir.

GALOUX. I agree with you. Animals larger than a hare should not be hunted.

BLANCHETTE. I know that these hunts allow luxurious showings, and give men a good chance to show their courage, but it's all nothing but vanity. Don't you think so, Monsieur Galoux?

GALOUX. Absolutely.

BLANCHETTE. If one could describe the moral sufferings of one of those hunted stags it would make the world weep.

GALOUX. But has the stag any moral sufferings?

BLANCHETTE. I believe so. In any case, if I were a lord — [*Rousset and Bonenfant enter*]

ROUSSET. Tell me, Blanchette, is it true that you refused to give this man something to drink? How do you do, Monsieur Galoux, and you, Mademoiselle Galoux? Answer me. Is it true that you refused to give this man something to drink?

BLANCHETTE. I don't remember.

ROUSSET. We'll have to clear up this little matter. [*Goes to the door at left*] Hey! wife, come here. [*Mme. Rousset enters*] You are a witness, Monsieur Galoux. Here is Bonenfant,

the roadmender, both a friend and client of mine. I've been wondering for quite some time now why I haven't been seeing my old friend Bonenfant. And just a little while ago, as I was going by the other tavern, you know the one which has the tobacco shop, I met Bonenfant coming out. Says I to him: "I notice that you do not trade with us any more." "No," says he, "but now all you receive are great people." Then he explained to me how one day when he came, and neither my wife nor I were at home, he couldn't get any one to wait on him. And I want to know now whether that is true.

BONENFANT. Your daughter told me that she did not know. But Mademoiselle Galoux can tell you — she was there.

BLANCHETTE. [*After a moment's embarrassment*] I won't lie; it's true.

BONENFANT. Ah, so you see!

ROUSSET. [*Furious*] Well now! You are now going to apologize to this man whom you have insulted, and hurt. You are going to beg him to pardon your pride. He's a roadmender, that's true, but he is a friend of your father, and you must respect him. Ah, so you were afraid of soiling your hands by giving a good man a cup of coffee! If I was able to send you to school until you were twenty years old and

give you that instruction of which you are now so proud, it was because neither your mother nor I were ever ashamed of the work which you now blush to do. [*He takes an apron from the table*] You are going to put on this apron. Not a word now, or I'll give you a slap in front of everybody here! [*He puts the apron on her*] You are going to beg the roadmender's pardon, and you are going to give him a cup of coffee.

BLANCHETTE. [*Going to the roadmender*] Monsieur, I beg your pardon. [*She weeps*]

BONENFANT. There's no sense in weeping about that, Blanchette, I'm not angry with you.

ROUSSET. Yes, yes. That's all right. Serve him now.

MME. ROUSSET. Come now! That's enough. I'll serve him myself.

ROUSSET. Be calm now, mother! [*To Blanchette*] And you, obey!

[*Still weeping she places a cup in front of the roadmender*]

LUCIE. [*Simply*] I'll help you. [*She brings the sugar bowl. Blanchette pours the coffee*]

GALOUX. If Mademoiselle Elise was in the wrong, père Rousset, she has now completely atoned for it, and it seems that you in turn —

ROUSSET. I beg your pardon, Monsieur Galoux, but I do as my head tells me — and, you

know, a pauper is master in his own house.

GALOUX. Very well. But I came to ask you to let your daughter spend the day tomorrow with Lucie.

ROUSSET. Yes, yes, but I don't know about tomorrow. You are very kind. We'll see.

GALOUX. As you wish. Good day, père Rousset. Good day, Mademoiselle. Look, père Rousset, how the poor girl is weeping.

ROUSSET. I see, I see. But if you think that those carryings on move me you are very much mistaken. Good day, Monsieur Galoux. Good day, Mademoiselle Galoux. [*Lucie embraces Blanchette silently and leaves with her father. Bonenfant has been silently drinking his coffee*]

BONENFANT. Ah now! That's what I call a good cup of coffee.

ROUSSET. I'll not take anything for it. It's my treat.

BONENFANT. Well, then! The coffee is even better than I thought. I'll see you again.

ROUSSET. And now you'll not be going to my competitor's any more, hein?

BONENFANT. No, I'll not do that.

ROUSSET. Good-bye. [*He goes*] [*To Blanchette*] Did Monsieur Galoux bring you your teacher's nomination?

BLANCHETTE. No. It means still waiting.

ROUSSET. Always the same. But what was he doing here?

BLANCHETTE. He came to invite me for tomorrow.

ROUSSET. Tomorrow you can't possibly go. You have other things to do tomorrow.

BLANCHETTE. What?

ROUSSET. The last two weeks' accounts.

BLANCHETTE. I'll finish them tonight before retiring.

ROUSSET. You had better not work at night.

BLANCHETTE. But I promised them. They expect me.

ROUSSET. Well, let them expect.

BLANCHETTE. I beg you. As long as the accounts will be ready —

ROUSSET. But why do you always like to be with those people so much? Do you perhaps prefer them to your parents?

BLANCHETTE. I am very fond of Lucie.

ROUSSET. Go and ask her to help you along.

BLANCHETTE. If I needed help she would give it to me.

ROUSSET. You really believe that!

BLANCHETTE. I am sure of it.

ROUSSET. Very well. But you'll not go. Besides, from tomorrow on, life is going to be different for you here. This has lasted much too long already.

Mme. Rousset. Just a little more patience, father.

Rousset. I have already had too much patience. They laughed at me. They promised us that she would earn something as soon as she had her degree, and we worked like dogs so that she could get it. But her nomination is not forthcoming. [*To Blanchette*] I'm not rich enough to let you keep living here without doing anything. And if you were only satisfied in not doing anything. But then you go and make a mess of things. With the inventions in your books you make me lose both my wheat and the price of the chemicals, which I was fool enough to use. Then you go and buy a lamp as high as a church steeple and which isn't worth anything, and because I am not wrapped in amazement you go and break it on purpose. One can see that you never had to earn any money. And that's not all. Then you try to stop me from making a living choosing our customers and you take the interest of strangers against your parents. Ah, they never brought me up like that. I was put to work when I was ten years old. I was not as smart as you, that's true enough, and I didn't laugh at my father when he guarded himself against lightning by methods that some good people had taught him — that's true, too — but at least I was good

for something. From tomorrow on you are going to earn your daily bread or you get none to eat.

BLANCHETTE. How?

ROUSSET. You will get up at five o'clock and come down here and wash the floor.

MME. ROUSSET. But what will I do then?

ROUSSET. You, wife, you will stay in bed. [*To Blanchette*] After that, you will stay here, and when the workingmen come before they go to the factory, or those that come from their night duty, you'll serve them.

MME. ROUSSET. Come now, Rousset, there's no place for a young girl among the workingmen who come here to drink.

ROUSSET. It's not the place for a young girl, isn't it? You used to do it. Did that stop me from marrying you? But to continue [*To Blanchette*] Then you'll wash the dishes. After supper you'll darn your stockings, because I forbid you to read.

MME. ROUSSET. Listen to me, Rousset.

ROUSSET. What am I asking her to do that she shouldn't do? I'm simply telling her to do the things that a tavern keeper's daughter should do. And isn't she that kind of a girl? Besides, there's no use in arguing, because she'll do as I tell her, or she'll get out.

MME. ROUSSET. But I don't want her to.

ROUSSET. What did you say? Who has the

right to say "I want" in this house? Ah, what's got into the women of today! I don't like these kind of carryings on. I am the master, do you hear, the master, and you must obey me.

MME. ROUSSET. Obey you!

ROUSSET. And you be quiet too, do you hear? And both of you be calm, or look out for yourselves!

MME. ROUSSET. I wouldn't be surprised if you'd strike me. It wouldn't be the first time.

ROUSSET. [*Striking the table with his fist*] I've had enough now! [*To Blanchette*] You'll do what I tell you, or you'll get out.

BLANCHETTE. Very well, I'll go.

ROUSSET. All right, good night. You'll probably find more to eat somewhere else.

BLANCHETTE. Haven't you reproached me enough about the food I eat here? But never mind: you'll reproach me no longer!

ROUSSET. I advise you to put in a complaint.

BLANCHETTE. Oh, yes, I'll put in a complaint, and I'll have a good right to do it. Didn't you torture me enough just today? For your birthday I bought you this lamp, hoping to please you. You maliciously deform it. Yes, I know that is nothing, but every day a little incident like that only goes to prove that we cannot live together. Everything that I

think is pretty you think is ugly. All that seems evil to me appears good in your eyes. You and I will never understand each other. We have become strangers. You have become stubborn in your routine work and I cannot even comprehend your moral code. Then I flattered your vanity and you showed me off as you would a trained dog. Now that's not enough for you. My pride hurts you, and you try on every occasion to humiliate me. You made me beg that roadmender's pardon because Lucie was here, and when Monsieur Galoux attempted to interpose you gave me one more mean thrust by using some vile words. All you know now is to find some new way to hurt me. What I am telling you is true: we have become strangers for one another. And it's best for every one that I should go, and I am going. I am going, I am going, I am going!

ROUSSET. Now you've said it just four times.

BLANCHETTE. Do you want me to go immediately?

ROUSSET. I had just as leave that you did. You have pride, but you also have a lot of laziness in you. Here, you get nourishment without doing anything, which means that you will stay here.

BLANCHETTE. Come now! You want me to! [*Goes left*]

ROUSSET. Where is she going?

MME. ROUSSET. She's probably gone to get her coat. Will you let her go?

ROUSSET. You really believe she's in earnest? Why it's all play acting, it's all comedy.

MME. ROUSSET. But if —

ROUSSET. Ah, if she absolutely wants to go, I am not here to stop her. [*Blanchette comes in, wearing her coat and hat*]

BLANCHETTE. Good-bye.

ROUSSET. Then you're serious?

BLANCHETTE. Very. [*To her mother*] Good-bye, mamma. [*She goes to embrace her*]

MME. ROUSSET. Come now, Blanchette, don't be silly. Go and embrace your father and the matter will be closed.

BLANCHETTE. It's useless. It'd be all the same tomorrow again.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Becoming angry*] Now listen to your mother. Go to him.

BLANCHETTE. No —

MME. ROUSSET. [*Angry*] What a stubborn child! Will you do as I tell you?

BLANCHETTE. No — Listen, mamma, I am sorry to leave you, but you cannot stop me — and besides, you do not know how to love me.

MME. ROUSSET [*Becoming still more angry*] You'll not obey me?

BLANCHETTE. No. It's useless. My mind is made up.

MME. ROUSSET [*Furious*] Very well! You can go to the devil! I was a fool to bother with you.

BLANCHETTE. Let me embrace you.

MME. ROUSSET. No. Not if you are going to leave me.

ROUSSET. Is this nonsense soon going to beover?

BLANCHETTE. Yes. Good-bye.

ROUSSET. Wait a bit! Just listen a moment what I have to say to you. If you step over that threshold you'll never come back over it as long as I am alive. You can be up to your neck in poverty and misery but there'll not even be the bit of bread that one gives to beggars here for you. You understand perfectly what I am telling you?

BLANCHETTE. You can be at your ease. I would rather die than ask for help from you. Good-bye.

ROUSSET. Good night. [*She leaves*]

MME. ROUSSET. [*Rushes to the door with a cry*] Blanchette, my daughter! Blanchette!

ROUSSET [*Holding her by the wrist*] You stay here, mother — I don't know that person who just left here any more. [*A pause*] Now go and get supper ready.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

[*The scene is the same as before. The pictures of Carnot and General Boulanger have been replaced by those of the Tsar and Felix Faure. November*]

[*Mme. Rousset is seated at the left. Rousset is at a table near the window. Both of them are resting their heads on their elbows and seem to be reflecting on something*]

ROUSSET [*After a long pause, without moving*] I'm going to see how my beets are getting along.

MME. ROUSSET. That's right. [*Another pause*]

ROUSSET. It's nine o'clock, and there goes the postman.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, it's nine o'clock.

ROUSSET. Why it looks as if he were coming in here.

MME. ROUSSET [*Quickly rising*] Perhaps he has a letter for us.

ROUSSET. For us. [*In a hard voice*] Who would write to us?

MME. ROUSSET. But —

ROUSSET. We've paid our taxes, and this isn't election time.

MME. ROUSSET. But he's really coming here —

ROUSSET. Ah —

MME. ROUSSET. Oh, Lord! If it were —

ROUSSET. Be quiet! [*The postman enters*]

THE POSTMAN. Good morning to you. It's not often that I have to come here. [*He looks in his bag*] Here — it's a letter for your daughter. [*Reading the envelope*] Mademoiselle Elise Rousset. Has she come back?

ROUSSET. No — but you can leave the letter here; we'll forward it.

THE POSTMAN. Give me her address. Thus you'll save three sous.

ROUSSET. Never mind. We have a reason.

THE POSTMAN. She still has her position?

ROUSSET. Yes.

THE POSTMAN. Always happy?

ROUSSET. Always.

THE POSTMAN. Isn't she coming back soon?

ROUSSET. No.

THE POSTMAN. Is she very far from here?

ROUSSET. Yes, very far.

THE POSTMAN. Well, good day —

ROUSSET. Good-bye, Monsieur Caillard.

MME. ROUSSET. *Au revoir.* [*He leaves*]

ROUSSET. [*After a pause goes to the door*] I'm going to see my beets. [*When he is on the point of going out he hesitates, looks at Mme. Rousset, who is still holding the letter between her fingers, with an air of indifference*] Where's the letter from?

MME. ROUSSET. It says on the envelope, *The Agricultor's Bookshop.*

ROUSSET. Ah, yes — that's where she bought her books on *fertilizers.*

MME. ROUSSET. When I think that she has not written once in over a year!

ROUSSET. It's better that way.

MME. ROUSSET. What makes me feel so badly is when people ask for news of her.

ROUSSET. All you have to say is yes — no — just like I do.

MME. ROUSSET. And when I have to say that she is well when perhaps she is dead.

ROUSSET. You have to invent something —

MME. ROUSSET. But every one knows the truth around here.

ROUSSET. Every one! Only père Bonenfant and the Morillons. And if they know it wasn't us that told 'em.

MME. ROUSSET. They guessed it.

ROUSSET. It's perfectly possible that they know — in fact, I know that they know. Only, since I have never let them perceive that I know, they have to pretend that they don't know. I prefer to have it that way. And now that's enough. I'm going to see my beets. [*He leaves*]

[*A moment later Bonenfant enters*]

BONENFANT. How do, mère Rousset?

MME. ROUSSET. Good morning, Bonenfant. Will you have some coffee?

BONENFANT. No thanks, not now. [*He looks at her smilingly*] Ha, ha.

MME. ROUSSET. You're happy this morning.

BONENFANT. Happy as a young girl. And have you had any news from Blanchette?

MME. ROUSSET. Yes, from time to time.

BONENFANT. That's nice. I too, I've had news from her.

MME. ROUSSET. Honestly? Tell me, tell me, please! —

BONENFANT. But it's probably the same that you've had. [*Mme. Rousset hurriedly gets a glass, which she fills and places in front of Bonenfant*]

MME. ROUSSET. You know very well that Rousset is not telling the truth. You know very well that we do not know where she is, that we don't even know whether she is still living.

BONENFANT Oh, she's still living —

MME. ROUSSET. And in good health? —

BONENFANT. Yes.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Sighs*] That's all I care about. Well drink, Bonenfant.

BONENFANT. What would you say if you saw her back here one of these days?

MME. ROUSSET. What I would say — what

I would say? — I don't know, but I'd be very happy. But it's not possible.

BONENFANT. With railroads people come and go from day to day.

MME. ROUSSET. You think that she'll come back?

BONENFANT. I've heard of stranger things.

MME. ROUSSET. You think that —

BONENFANT. I won't say yes, and I won't say no. But I've been told that it's very probable.

MME. ROUSSET. Who told you so?

BONENFANT. Why, I had a letter

MME. ROUSSET. From whom?

BONENFANT. Oh, from a friend of mine. [*He laughs*]

MME. ROUSSET. I know very well who wrote you this letter.

BONENFANT. No one but myself knows anything about it.

MME. ROUSSET. You've seen Blanchette?

BONENFANT. I? That's good. You think that I've just seen Blanchette.

MME. ROUSSET. Yes. You do not know how to read; so in order to know what is in the letter you must have shown it to some one, and since you yourself say that no one knows about it but yourself, it simply shows

that there never was a letter and that you must have seen Blanchette.

BONENFANT. Ah, how these women blab!

MME. ROUSSET. Tell me, am I right?

BONENFANT. Let me drink my coffee first. [*While he is drinking he watches her from the corner of his eye*]

MME. ROUSSET. Well?

BONENFANT. Wait until I have finished. [*He rises and looks out of the window*]

MME. ROUSSET. She is there?

BONENFANT. Now père Rousset has gone behind the grove, and there's no more danger. [*He goes to the door*]

MME. ROUSSET. She is there!

BONENFANT. Don't budge! If you move you'll not see her. [*Blanchette appears on the threshold. She is very thin and poorly dressed. Mme. Rousset cannot move from astonishment. Bonenfant goes out, closing the door behind him*]

BLANCHETTE. [*Simply*] Mamma, I ask your forgiveness.

MME. ROUSSET. [*Without hearing her, and still motionless*] Is it possible! Is it possible!

BLANCHETTE. [*Advancing*] Mamma, I ask your forgiveness.

MME. ROUSSET. She is here — but —

BLANCHETTE. [*Throwing herself into her mother's arms*] Mamma.

MME. ROUSSET. Blanchette — [*She is choked with tears, and covers Blanchette with kisses*] Is it possible! Is it possible! She is back again! She is back again. [*Bonenfant opens the door*]

MME. ROUSSET. [*Frightened*] My God! Your father is here! [*Bonenfant appears smiling*] No! it's only that fool of a roadmender. [*Bonenfant bows and goes out again*] How frightened I was!

BLANCHETTE. He'll not forgive me, he —

MME. ROUSSET. [*Evadingly*] Why yes —

BLANCHETTE. You certainly ought to know.

MME. ROUSSET. But how should I?

BLANCHETTE. When you spoke of me he used to say hard things, didn't he?

MME. ROUSSET. No. Only it will be better if he does not find you here until I have prepared him.

BLANCHETTE. I think that you are right. That is why I sent Bonenfant ahead.

BONENFANT. [*Outside the window*] I'm watching for him. From here I can see him come out of the grove.

MME. ROUSSET. You can go up stairs and wait. I'll call you then.

BLANCHETTE. Yes, mother. If he only does not send me away!

MME. ROUSSET. He'll not do that.

BLANCHETTE. If he sent me away it would

be terrible, for you see mamma I was at the end of my rope.

MME. ROUSSET. My poor Blanchette! What have you done since you left home?

BLANCHETTE. It would be too long and sad to tell you all at once. But I'll tell you all, little by little.

MME. ROUSSET. You must be hungry, poor dear!

BLANCHETTE. [*Smiling*] I am.

MME. ROUSSET. And to think that I — [*She brings her some bread and a knife*]

BLANCHETTE. Thank you. What good bread. Does Denis still bring it.

MME. ROUSSET. Don't eat your bread dry. [*She brings her some cheese*] Yes, it's still Denis. He has a new wagon.

BLANCHETTE. Ah! And I'm sure he is proud of it.

MME. ROUSSET. No one's too good for him.

BLANCHETTE. And pot cheese! The kind that father makes himself.

MME. ROUSSET. You remember!

BLANCHETTE. And no one else but himself is allowed to touch it.

MME. ROUSSET. That's right. He hasn't changed at all, you know.

BLANCHETTE. I was hungry, and now I cannot eat any more; I am so happy. [*Look-*

ing at her mother] Mother! How much sadness I have already brought into your life, and how good you are to be willing to forget it all —

MME. ROUSSET. But eat, eat — you should have had some bouillon — and a glass of cider! — I don't think of anything. We have some good cider. We made six kegs this year. Taste it. It is good.

BLANCHETTE. Very good.

MME. ROUSSET. The Morillons wanted us to give them some.

BLANCHETTE. The Morillons. They are still as happy as ever?

MME. ROUSSET. Yes.

BONENFANT. [*Through the window*] Here he comes.

MME. ROUSSET. Oh, Lord! Go — go quickly — I'll call you. Take this with you! You haven't eaten anything. But yes — go — [*She hurries her to the door and then quickly sweeps the table. Rousset enters*]

MME. ROUSSET. Well, did you see your beets?

ROUSSET. Yes.

MME. ROUSSET. Are they good?

ROUSSET. The man who buys them will say they don't weigh anything. Have you seen anybody this morning?

MME. ROUSSET. No one.

ROUSSET. Ah!

MME. ROUSSET. Why do you say "ah."

ROUSSET. Because — because some one told me that they saw a stranger from the distance.

MME. ROUSSET. I haven't seen any one.

ROUSSET. [*Pointing to Bonenfant's glass*] Then you have been drinking alone, eh?

MME. ROUSSET. Oh! I remember now: père Bonenfant was here.

ROUSSET. You see.

MME. ROUSSET. But père Bonenfant is no one.

ROUSSET. But that's just it, for it was with père Bonenfant that the stranger was seen.

MME. ROUSSET. Perhaps —

ROUSSET. Perhaps what?

MME. ROUSSET. I don't know —

ROUSSET. All right. Give me a bite to eat. [*During the following, Mme. Rousset puts a whole loaf of bread on the table, as well as some cheese and a glass of cider. Rousset puts on his glasses*] What did you do with that letter?

MME. ROUSSET. What letter? Ah, yes! [*Pointing to the counter*] There it is.

ROUSSET. What's in it?

MME. ROUSSET. I don't know.

ROUSSET. [*Taking the letter*] You didn't look

at it. — You're not very curious — or perhaps you didn't have the time. [*He opens it and reads the following*] "We beg you to kindly remit at your very earliest opportunity the money you owe us from the books that were sent to you almost two years ago. We have called your attention to this matter several times. The books in question are:— On Intensive Agriculture — On the Use of Agricultural Machinery — A Treatise on Political Economy — The Fortune Made by the Use of Chemical Fertilizers — The Product of the Soil."

MME. ROUSSET. Those are some books that she bought.

ROUSSET. Yes, yes, I remember.

MME. ROUSSET. It was for us that she bought them.

ROUSSET. For us! Did you read them? Did I read them?

MME. ROUSSET. For our benefit, I meant to say.

ROUSSET. Yes, to spoil things! Our benefit? To spoil things, there's no other way to put it.

MME. ROUSSET. She meant to do good.

ROUSSET. She meant to do good too, I suppose, when she broke the lamp on purpose. It was the very same day. It was the day she left! [*Looking at the bill*] How much! How much! How much do you make it?

MME. ROUSSET. [*Timidly*] Thirty-two francs —

ROUSSET. Thirty-two francs! Ah, but that's going too far!

MME. ROUSSET. I'll go and see — they may make a reduction. They may have made a mistake.

ROUSSET. You'll go and see nothing! It's not us that ordered them — them — them — devil's things. Eh? So we don't owe anything. Let them go and get it from her! She must have earned enough in her Paris. And besides, but that's enough! [*He sits down to eat. He takes a knife out of his pocket, opens it, and wipes it on his trousers. He sees the whole loaf of bread*] Why cut into a fresh loaf?

MME. ROUSSET. But —

ROUSSET. There was some left.

MME. ROUSSET. I assure you —

ROUSSET. But I'm positive. It's not on account of the bit of bread, but I am sure that there was some left.

MME. ROUSSET. You are right — there was a small piece left.

ROUSSET. You see. Well, bring it to me. There's no use in throwing it away.

MME. ROUSSET. Why, you see —

ROUSSET. What?

MME. ROUSSET. I remember now, I gave

it to a road-maker — he was a poor fellow.

ROUSSET. That's all right, that's all right.

MME. ROUSSET. It was only a very small piece.

ROUSSET. And you also gave your road-maker some cheese?

MME. ROUSSET. He had a little child with him.

ROUSSET. You seem to be very charitable today. [*He drinks. While Mme. Rousset has her back turned he picks up a small comb from the floor, which Blanchette has lost. He gazes at it and then puts it in his pocket*] What did Bonenfant have to say for himself?

MME. ROUSSET. Nothing.

ROUSSET. Nothing! He told you something just the same.

MME. ROUSSET. I don't remember any more.

ROUSSET. You haven't much of a memory.

MME. ROUSSET. Who? I?

ROUSSET. Oh, no. I was talking about the curate. Now tell me, mother.

MME. ROUSSET. What?

ROUSSET. Since they have written here it must be that they thought that she had returned, eh?

MME. ROUSSET. I don't know —

ROUSSET. Or that she has an idea of returning.

MME. ROUSSET. You're always looking for underhand dealings! You'd better go read your paper.

ROUSSET. Then you don't remember. [*All of a sudden*] Some one just was walking upstairs. Didn't you hear it?

MME. ROUSSET. No —

ROUSSET. I assure you that some one was walking. There is somebody here.

MME. ROUSSET. You're crazy — or you've had too much to drink. That's it, you've had too much to drink. I heard absolutely nothing.

ROUSSET. [*Taking up his stick*] All right. But I'll go up and see. And thieves had better beware!

MME. ROUSSET. No! — I do not want you to! —

ROUSSET. Ah! Ah! — It's that wretch of a daughter of yours who is up there. You don't think I guessed it?

MME. ROUSSET. No, it's not she.

ROUSSET. Then your daughter has not returned?

MME. ROUSSET. No.

ROUSSET. Well then, let me go up.

MME. ROUSSET. I don't want you to. I guess you can believe me when I tell you something. I've just come down, and there's no one up there.

ROUSSET. Then your daughter is not here?

MME. ROUSSET. No.

ROUSSET. Then your daughter is not here?

MME. ROUSSET. No.

ROUSSET. Well then, to whom does this comb belong that I have just found? It certainly is not yours. You are sure that your daughter is not here?

MME. ROUSSET. I am quite sure.

ROUSSET. Listen, listen — now do you hear some one walking? Now — they are coming down the stairs. Liar that you are!

MME. ROUSSET. Oh, heavens!

ROUSSET. Do you hear. She is here, I say, she is here. Ha, there she is. [*Blanchette appears*]

BLANCHETTE. Yes, it is I. Now do what you want with me.

ROUSSET. [*In a hard voice*] Get out of here, do you understand!

BLANCHETTE. Father, are you really going to send me away?

ROUSSET. Yes.

BLANCHETTE. You ought to have pity on me. Ah, yes, you ought to have pity on me.

ROUSSET. No nonsense now! What did I tell you when you said that you were going?

BLANCHETTE. If I came back it was only because I could not stand it any longer.

ROUSSET. You haven't much courage!

BLANCHETTE. If that were true I would have suffered less.

ROUSSET. No, it's true, you haven't much courage. After what you told me when you were leaving I would have rather drowned myself than come back here; especially after what I said to you — hard as it was for me to do so. When one has courage one does not starve.

BLANCHETTE. That's what I thought when I left.

ROUSSET. Well?

BLANCHETTE. Well, it is not so.

ROUSSET. There's no end of work to be had in Paris.

BLANCHETTE. Nor workmen either.

ROUSSET. You were afraid of spoiling your dainty fingers doing sewing, I suppose!

BLANCHETTE. No, not that! But no one wanted me.

ROUSSET. Nonsense!

BLANCHETTE. I knew how to embroider but I could not sew. However I sewed beads on lace and earned twenty sous, working twelve hours.

ROUSSET. One can live on that.

BLANCHETTE. But there is the dull season.

ROUSSET. All that is none of my affairs. What did I tell when you left? What did I

say? I don't know you any more. Now get out.

MME. ROUSSET. Rousset, I implore you, Rousset!

ROUSSET. Come, come! Do you want to break my ears? I warned her of all this.

BLANCHETTE. Then you are going to send me away?

ROUSSET. How many times do you want me to tell you so?

BLANCHETTE. You want to send me away without knowing whether I may not die of starvation on your doorstep?

ROUSSET. Go back from where you came from. You have existed up to now, haven't you? Well, go back and do again what you were doing.

BLANCHETTE. But lately I haven't even had enough to eat. If you only knew what it was for a woman to work in Paris! There are ten applicants for a day's work, and in this way one stops the other from earning a living without being able to live one's self. If you only knew how one is on the track of hand written billboards which advertise for unskilled workmen. And if you realized how one is exploited! There are people who simply wait until you have fallen to the very poorest state and then propose the most abominable

things to you; and they laugh at you when you refuse, and say to you: "If you had rather starve in the gutter that is your affair." I have seen all that, I have gone through all that. In the end I understood that it was impossible, and I have returned because coming back to you was the only decent and courageous thing left for me to do. No, I do not want to begin it all over again. I could not if I wanted to. [*She kneels*] Father, I ask your forgiveness! I promise that you will never have any reason to find fault with me again. I promise never to be proud again and always to obey you. Father, I ask your forgiveness. Don't throw me back on to the street, I implore you. I cannot earn my daily bread, so what could I do if you sent me away?

ROUSSET. You can go to Monsieur Galoux. He promised to engage you to give your friend Lucie lessons, your great friend —

BLANCHETTE. Monsieur Galoux kept his promise.

ROUSSET. And you did not stay there?

BLANCHETTE. No.

ROUSSET. But that was the place for you. You did not have to soil your hands, and that must have pleased you. I suppose you

went and did something foolish and they made you get out.

BLANCHETTE. No, I did nothing wrong.

ROUSSET. If you did nothing wrong they could not have sent you away.

BLANCHETTE. You believe that?

ROUSSET. Of course!

BLANCHETTE. I had hardly entered Monsieur Galoux's services when his son, Monsieur George, wanted to make me his mistress. Then he spoke to me of marriage. It was then that they sent me away. Oh, they paid me a lot of compliments, but they gave me to understand that virtue and instruction could not take the place of a dowry, and they offered me a sum of money which I refused.

ROUSSET. Ah! Always these ideas of grandeur.

BLANCHETTE. How I wept and suffered from shame! But listen. From the Galoux's I went into another place, but I had to leave there also. In that place it was the mother who sent me away, — yes, the mother, — because in taking a companion for her daughter, she meant, at the same time, to have a teacher free from dangers. And after that? — a very respectable old gentleman had lost a daughter of just my age and whom he said I resembled. He wanted me to fill her place. Ah, that

ignoble man! When I left, he shrugged his shoulders: my frankness made him pity me. That poor, inconsolable father! In another house it was the husband —

ROUSSET. You should have found a position with a single woman.

BLANCHETTE. That is just what I did, I was all right there, and I scrubbed the floor as you asked me to do. But I got nothing to eat. After all, I almost regret now that I did not imitate other girls I met, who were in just my position. They took the primrose path. And they are not to be pitied for it; no, on the contrary. Yes, yes, I am telling you the truth. Instruction does not teach virtue. There are enough miserable creatures who can roll up their teachers' degrees in their prostitute licenses.

ROUSSET. Then it is wrong to educate one's children?

BLANCHETTE. No. But one should show them how to make use of their education, and not try to make government officials of them.

ROUSSET. Be quiet, some one is coming. [*Bonenfant enters*]

BONENFANT. How do you do one and all. [*Sitting down*] I'd like a cup of coffee. [*Pretending to notice Blanchette for the first time*] Why, Blanchette!

ROUSSET. She dropped in to pay us a little visit.

BONENFANT. Ah! Well, I'll take a cup of coffee just the same. [*Mme. Rousset is about to get the things, but Blanchette stops her*]

BLANCHETTE. [*Looking at her father, who himself is watching her from the corner of his eye*] But — I'll get everything, mamma. Give me your apron. [*She waits on Bonenfant. Not a word is spoken. Rousset watches her with surprise, and is a little touched*]

BONENFANT. [*After having drunk*] Ah! — [*He gives Blanchette a coin which she gives to her mother. She clears the table. Morillon and Auguste enter*]

MORILLON. How do you do, père Rousset. [*To Blanchette*] You back again, Miss Blanchette? Ah! — I am very happy to see you, very happy — and I am not the only one — Eh, Auguste?

ROUSSET. Bless my soul!

MORILLON. Well, père Rousset?

ROUSSET. What?

MORILLON. Come with me a bit; I have something to tell you.

ROUSSET. Oh, I can't. I haven't the time now.

MORILLON. It's about the land.

ROUSSET. About that David land?

MORILLON. Well, come on, come on. [*To the rest*] We'll be back soon. [*He drags Rousset out with him. Auguste remains standing. He is visibly embarrassed.*]

BLANCHETTE. Won't you sit down?

MME. ROUSSET. [*Looks at them. Then she says*] Excuse me if I leave you alone for a few minutes. I'll come back. [*She leaves*]

AUGUSTE. They told us that you had returned, and as my father and I were passing by we thought we would drop in and see how you were.

BLANCHETTE. It was very kind of you.

AUGUSTE. Have you come back now to stay?

BLANCHETTE. No, I'm going away again.

AUGUSTE. [*Disconcerted*] Ah! — ah! you —

BLANCHETTE. Yes.

AUGUSTE. You like Paris better?

BLANCHETTE. Oh, heavens, no! You have no idea how I dread Paris.

AUGUSTE. But — you have ties that bind you there!

BLANCHETTE. None at all.

AUGUSTE. I — I've been waiting — one of these days — to hear of your marriage.

BLANCHETTE. With whom, pray tell me?

AUGUSTE. Oh, I don't know. You are — you are — I don't know — nice enough — one would have thought — that down there there

would have been fellows who — I really don't know —

BLANCHETTE. Who wanted me? No, there were none — at least those who did were such miserable rascals that I kept them away from me.

AUGUSTE. Really — you — then you need not return.

BLANCHETTE. Yes. My father won't have me here.

AUGUSTE. What I wanted to say was that no one is waiting for you — you are not —

BLANCHETTE. There is no one.

AUGUSTE. I am so glad to hear that. Then it's really true? — it's really true that you have no friend waiting for you? — and you —

BLANCHETTE. And I never had any — I swear it to you. Oh, I was unhappy — so unhappy.

AUGUSTE. And I am so glad! — I don't think you can realize just how happy I am. And now I have some things to tell you.

BLANCHETTE. Go on.

AUGUSTE. We have had to enlarge our workshop — for we now have to employ three workmen. And during harvest we have had as many as five. We are very happy. We make ten, twelve, and even fifteen francs a day —

and since you left I have laid four hundred francs aside. My father talks of retiring. Listen to me, listen to me. We have had another story built with a large window — and —[*Pause*]

BLANCHETTE. Why are you telling me —

AUGUSTE. [*Suddenly*] Well! — It's clear enough! — you — I — I want to ask you to marry me.

BLANCHETTE. [*Very much moved*] Auguste —

AUGUSTE. Tell me, is it yes or no? I have been waiting for you.

BLANCHETTE. Ah, what a truly good boy you are!

AUGUSTE. Then it's — yes?

[*After a pause Blanchette throws herself into his arms*]

AUGUSTE. Then it's yes! Well, you can pride yourself on having made some one happy. — Good Lord! You'll see whether I'll make a good husband or not. You'll see! You'll not go back on your word, will you? My, but I am a lucky fellow! — [*He laughs*] But now let me kiss you too!

[*Bonenfant enters*]

BONENFANT. Oh, I *beg* your pardon. [*He is about to leave*]

AUGUSTE. You're back again, père Bonenfant?

BONENFANT. I returned because I forgot to have my drink after my coffee.

BLANCHETTE. [*Gay*] I'll give you your drink, père Bonenfant,

AUGUSTE. And a lump of sugar too?

[*Rousset and Morillon enter at rear*]

BONENFANT. I am served like a prince!

[*Auguste is standing next to the table. Blanchette, at his side; her hand is on his shoulder, Both of them are very happy*]

BLANCHETTE. Is it good?

BONENFANT. Very good. [*He looks at them and laughs. Then Auguste laughs, and finally Blanchette joins in*]

BONENFANT. I bet you're not going to invite me to the wedding!

BLANCHETTE AND AUGUSTE. But of course we will!

MORILLON. [*Stepping up*] That is if I give my consent! — and I do that with all my heart.

[*Bonenfant is about to leave when he meets Rousset at the door*]

BONENFANT. Well, so Blanchette is going again?

ROUSSET. We'll see. After one goes to the trouble of bringing up children they always end by leaving their home for the home of another.

[*Mme. Rousset bursts into tears. Blanchette and*

Auguste go to her, and Blanchette takes her mother in her arms]

BLANCHETTE. Mother!

MME. ROUSSET. It's because I am so happy!

ROUSSET. And am I a stranger here? Won't any one embrace me?

[*Blanchette throws herself into her father's arms*]

CURTAIN

THE ESCAPE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Dr. Bertry.....A Prominent Physician.
Jean Belmont..... His Stepson.
Monsieur Bertry..... His Brother.
Lucienne Bertry..... Monsieur Bertry's Daughter.
Dr. La Belleuse.....Dr. Bertry's Secretary.
Paul de Maucour.....Lucienne's Former Fiancé.
Alice de Maucour.....His Wife.
Monsieur Longuyon..... A Friend of the Bertrys.
Madame Longuyon.....His Wife.
Madame de Cattenières.....A Friend of the Bertrys.
Dr. Richon.....A Physician from Ébreville.
Dr. Morienval..... A Young Parisian Physician.
Père Guernoche..... A Shepherd from Ébreville.
Rosalie.....Maid at the Bertrys.
Justin.....Her Husband.
Ségard.....A Farmer at Ébreville.
A Man — A Servant — A Farmer.....

Time — The Present. Place — Paris and Ébreville.

THE ESCAPE

ACT I.

As the curtain rises Dr. Bertry, a man of sixty years, is discovered correcting proof.

THE DOCTOR. This will have to be printed as soon as possible. No mistakes! [*He re-reads aloud*] "Dr. Bertry, a member of the academy of medicine, *professeur libre* of neuro-pathology, will again give his lectures at the *Ecole Pratique* beginning on the third of October." It seems to me that my name and title could be set in larger type. I don't know that it can be read easily enough as it is. [*He rises and gives the placard to the servant. Then he retires a few steps in order to judge the effect*] Will you hold it, so that I can see it better? That's it! It'll have to be set in a little larger type. [*He underlines it in blue pencil*] Don't let them forget that! [*He strikes a bell*]

THE MAN. I'll see that it is all right, monsieur. [*He leaves*]

[*Rosalie enters. She is about fifty years old, and very sad.*]

ROSALIE. Did you ring, doctor?

THE DOCTOR. Yes. Take these notes to Mademoiselle Lucienne, and tell her that I should like to have them copied. Is there any one in the waiting room?

ROSALIE. Dr. La Belleuse is there, monsieur.

THE DOCTOR. Tell him to come in.

ROSALIE. Haven't you anything to tell me about Justin?

THE DOCTOR. My poor Rosalie, I have begged you to have courage. There is no hope for your husband. Science, I am sorry to say, can do nothing for him. Tell Doctor La Belleuse to come in.

[*She goes out to the waiting room and ushers La Belleuse in. He is a man of about thirty-five, good looking but insipid. He wears several foreign orders*]

THE DOCTOR. Excuse me, my friend, for receiving you here today, but my office is littered with trunks and packages. We have had a shock. My step-son owns a lot of land at Ébreville and the manager he has put in charge there is stealing from him. Good Dr. Richon, the physician at Ébreville, came to Paris this morning to tell us about it. And so we are leaving earlier than we intended to. But let us get down to business. Besides, we are in a hurry, as my niece expects some callers here.

La Belleuse. [*Opening a portfolio*] Here you are!

The Doctor. What have you there?

La Belleuse. These are the proofs of your biography. I have done the work, I assure you, with the greatest care.

The Doctor. Ah! Let's see.

La Belleuse. Your picture here.

The Doctor. Do I look like that?

La Belleuse. Yes and no. There is something lacking.

The Doctor. Ah yes! it's imperceptible. Well, have you any news?

La Belleuse. About?

The Doctor. Yes.

La Belleuse. You were told right — there are three crosses of the commander.

The Doctor. We shall have to find out, then, to which ministry they belong. If they come under the department of public instruction we must bring more into the foreground the work I did as a professor; if they come under the department of the interior, we will merely mention my other official titles. But we will talk of my affairs later! Let us now clear up the things of secondary importance. Do you want to ask my advice about anything?

La Belleuse. Yes, dear master. I have

something that bothers me: I have a patient whom I cannot cure.

THE DOCTOR. Such things will happen.

LA BELLEUSE. Evidently, but — he wants to go to Lourdes.

THE DOCTOR. Let him go.

LA BELLEUSE. [*Astonished*] You don't mean it — suppose he gets cured?

THE DOCTOR. You can always find some sort of scientific explanation.

LA BELLEUSE. Suggestion?

THE DOCTOR. Of course! — that answers almost every question. Now what else?

LA BELLEUSE. Then I have Probard — a client about whom I have already spoken to you. He hasn't more than a week to live.

THE DOCTOR. Call in another doctor. That will free you from the responsibility.

LA BELLEUSE. But — Probard is a man of some standing.

THE DOCTOR. Then call in two doctors for consultation.

LA BELLEUSE. Very well — then, at the *salle Saint Thérèse*, number four is still in the same condition.

THE DOCTOR. Have you tried everything?

LA BELLEUSE. Everything.

THE DOCTOR. Even to doing nothing?

La Belleuse. Even that. Not one of us can tell what is the matter with her.

The Doctor. [*Sighs*] Then we shall not know until after the autopsy. So we must wait!

La Belleuse. And stop all treatment?

The Doctor. No. One must never have the appearance of not being interested. That would be a mistake. An unpardonable mistake. Do something, no matter what. Is that all?

La Belleuse. Yes, I think that is everything.

The Doctor. Well, now let us get down to my business. [*La Belleuse sits down*] Do you know the number of patients who were treated at the clinic?

La Belleuse. There were not so many patients as last year.

The Doctor. In that case let us not talk about it any longer.

La Belleuse. That is what I thought.

The Doctor. Now about my biography! — Let's see! [*He reads a moment in a low voice*] Isn't this a bit too strong: "Dr. Bertry is one of the medical celebrities of the century!!!"

La Belleuse. [*Taking a pen*] Well — we can put "of the last twenty years."

The Doctor. [*Stopping him*] Never mind!

I'll leave myself in your hands; you understand this sort of thing better than I do.

La Belleuse. Then shall we say, "of the last twenty years"?

The Doctor. [*Stopping him again*] Wait! — it's for you to decide. Bah! let it go as it is. Ah, but we'll have to modify this passage: "Dr. Bertry's fame dates from 1866. At that time a small doctor in Compiègne, he had the good fortune to care for and cure one of the ladies of the Court, Madame de X. This marvelous cure brought to him the admiration and friendship of the emperor, who gave him the title of," etc.

La Belleuse. But isn't that correct?

The Doctor. Yes. But the form is bad. Write [*he walks up and down while he dictates as follows*]: "In 1866, Dr. Bertry, although he was living in Compiègne, had already acquired such renown that a lady of the Court — of the imperial Court — Madame de X — had recourse to his treatment. Dr. Bertry cured her, and the emperor, hearing of this marvelous cure — this marvelous cure, had him called to Paris. The — celebrated doctor," — it's all right to say celebrated doctor, isn't it? — " although it was an act which did violence to his political opinions, went where duty called him — " [*Bertry has now come close to La Belleuse, and*

reads over his shoulders] Have you all that? Good! "During the epidemic he exposed his life to all sorts of dangers a thousand times, in company with Dr. Miron." But no! Erase: "in company with Dr. Miron." That would look too much like an advertisement. [*La Belleuse erases it*]

La Belleuse. The rest is devoted to your work on heredity.

The Doctor. Ah! I was wondering whether you had forgotten that. Well, read it!

La Belleuse. [*Reading*] "But what, above all, constitutes the work of Dr. Bertry are his studies on heredity. Going farther than Lucas, Morel, and Galton, Bertry has shown the invincible power of these laws, henceforth immutable. His various works on this subject represent the fruits of thirty years of uninterrupted toil."

The Doctor. [*Who has again come up to La Belleuse*] Put in there: "Twelve volumes published by Alcan —" [*La Belleuse writes*] Do you mention my extensive correspondence with the Academy?

La Belleuse. Yes.

The Doctor. And with the newspapers?

La Belleuse. No.

The Doctor. Write: "Even the political organs have spoken, in the most eulogistic

manner, of the discoveries made by this savant, for Dr. Bertry has never scorned interviews." Wait — that sentence might not be interpreted correctly — yes — add: "And this, not because he is seeking vulgar advertisement, of which he has the most abject horror, but only because of his desire to spread the truth!" What next?

La Belleuse. [*Reading*] "Dr. Bertry has made heredity his own study; he has collected on this subject the most numerous and most convincing observations. Where his illustrious predecessors have made only timid suppositions, he has formulated principles, established certitudes."

The Doctor. That is very good.

La Belleuse. The rest has to do —

The Doctor. Let's see it. [*He reads; then laughs*] Ha, ha, my young friend, you have not forgotten yourself.

La Belleuse. [*Rises, blushing*] I?

The Doctor. Yes, you! [*Reading*] "With the co-operation of the young and active Dr. La Belleuse, his devoted secretary and collaborator — "

La Belleuse. I thought —

The Doctor. That's all right. You'd like something, eh?

La Belleuse. Heavens! [*Pointing to his*

buttonhole] I have, you know, nothing but foreign orders. And I thought that the same promotion which gave the *cravate rouge* to the master, might perhaps give the humble disciple a bit of ribbon — of the same color.

THE DOCTOR. We'll see.

LA BELLEUSE. I am preparing some observations on heredity, based on your theories. You haven't any new ones, have you?

THE DOCTOR. Yes. I have just sent three notes to my niece for her to copy. Observations! There's no lack of them!

LA BELLEUSE. Of course, it would be foolish indeed still to doubt, after your admirable studies — and according to Auguste Comte, the dead have more influence on us than the living.

THE DOCTOR. That is true. Then you will attend to all these little details. Write to me, and I will try to get something for you.

LA BELLEUSE. Dear master!

THE DOCTOR [*Carelessly*] That will make a good topic with which to start my talk with the minister — ah! tell me? Are you going at once to find out about the conferring of the crosses?

LA BELLEUSE. I'll go and come back immediately.

THE DOCTOR. That's right. [*La Belleuse*

goes out] There's a nice chap for you!

[*Bertry arranges the papers that are lying about, then looks at himself in the mirror above the fireplace, at the left. He looks at his tongue, and feels his pulse. He rings the bell, and then sits down on the couch. He ponders a moment and sighs deeply. He rings again. Rosalie appears.*]

The Doctor. My medicine. [*Rosalie goes*] And to think that I teach how to cure others!

Rosalie. [*Returning with a glass on a tray*] You are not feeling any better, monsieur?

The Doctor. [*With ill-humor*] Yes I am. And since I have told you that I do not want any one to speak about my health — you simply shout it out — you want the whole world to know about it. You and my brother are the only ones who know about my illness, and I do not want others. . . . [*He drinks*] Yes, I had a bad night, there. Now are you satisfied?

Rosalie. [*Apologizing*] But, monsieur —

The Doctor. That's all right. Did you take my notes to Mademoiselle Lucienne?

Rosalie. Yes, monsieur. She has finished the work that you gave her yesterday, monsieur.

The Doctor. That's good!

Rosalie. Could I have a word with you, monsieur, without disturbing you?

The Doctor. Go ahead.

ROSALIE. It's still about my poor husband. As long as the doctors can do nothing for him.

THE DOCTOR. Well?

ROSALIE. [*Hesitating*] Do you, monsieur — do you perhaps know of père Guernoche?

THE DOCTOR. Who is he?

ROSALIE. He is an old shepherd who comes from the same place I do — Ébreville, where we are going — I have been told that he has a secret and an elixir by which he cures all maladies. [*Bertry shrugs his shoulders*] And so I should like my poor Justin to see him.

THE DOCTOR. Do what you want to, but I warn you that Justin will be dead before he reaches Ébreville.

ROSALIE. If I were sure of that!

THE DOCTOR. Try it!

ROSALIE. But it's Justin himself who wants to go. He is convinced that père Guernoche will cure him. When I told him yesterday that we were going to Ébreville he asked me whether I was going to take him along. I did not dare say no, and this morning he was already feeling much better.

THE DOCTOR. As a physician, I forbid you to allow your husband to travel.

[*Mr. Bertry enters*] Here is my brother. Leave us! [*Rosalie goes*]

BERTRY. [*Fifty-three years old*] How are you?

THE DOCTOR. [*After looking about, he speaks in a low voice*] Always the same.

BERTRY. What kind of a night did you have?

THE DOCTOR. A bad one.

BERTRY. Poor fellow! Well, what is really the matter with you?

THE DOCTOR. If you knew more about science you would probably realize that physicians' illnesses are almost always exceptional cases.

BERTRY. And if one of your patients were afflicted with your malady?

THE DOCTOR. Ah! If it were a client, I should have to find some name for his sickness — and I should tell him that there was hope for his recovery — I should deceive him — but I cannot fool myself.

BERTRY. Why not see another doctor?

THE DOCTOR. You are crazy.

BERTRY. But why not?

THE DOCTOR. They'd make fun of me.

BERTRY You know my opinion of medicine, I don't believe in it — but as you are forced to believe in it, I thought —

THE DOCTOR. That's all right. Have you found a new manager?

BERTRY. No.

THE DOCTOR. Good Dr. Richon has gone to look for one. Doesn't the idea of putting your-

self at the head of this great agricultural exploitation tempt you at all?

BERTRY. Tempt me? You think, then, that because I was formerly a manufacturer I could now transform myself into a farmer, at my age? But why don't you send your step-son to take charge of things at Ébreville?

THE DOCTOR. Jean?

BERTRY. Of course! The lands are his. He is sickly, and that life will make him feel better.

THE DOCTOR. Nothing of the kind.

BERTRY. But —

THE DOCTOR. [*In a superior manner*] Come, come now! You are not going to pretend to discuss such things with me, I hope? I am very much afraid that nothing can save Jean from his melancholy.

BERTRY. But why?

THE DOCTOR. When I married his mother, you remember he was only two years old, and she died a short while after our marriage. I brought up Jean then, and he has grown up under my eyes — I know what is the matter with him.

BERTRY. What?

THE DOCTOR. Jean belongs to a family in which hypochondria and suicide are hereditary.

BERTRY. But isn't there a cure for that?

The Doctor. Yes, but it works only on rare occasions. I have done what I could; I wanted to distract him, and have him out in the open; I sent him to college in the country, in order to ease my conscience, but all, of course, was of no avail. When he reached his twenty-fifth year I used the great means.

Bertry. You frighten me.

The Doctor. I bade him summon up all his strength; then I told him his father's life story; I told him of the terrible ancestral influence that hung over him; I gave him my books to read, trusting that, knowing of the dangers which beset him, he would decide to save himself, to react. He was sadder than before.

Bertry. That does not surprise me!

The Doctor. You remember — it was when he fell in love with your daughter. [*After reflecting*] Come to think of it, that would be a good reason for making him leave here.

Bertry. Oh, you can be easy about that! Jean is so timid that he would never dare say a word to Lucienne about it. Besides, he keeps away from her, and they treat each other as if they were strangers. He once confided in me, and I then told you his secret, which I alone was to know. And when he found out that you were opposed to this marriage — in the name of science —

THE DOCTOR. Yes, in the name of science.

BERTRY. He bowed down to your will, and so did I.

THE DOCTOR. I am glad!

BERTRY. He has tried traveling.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, and he came back just as sad as he was when he went away.

BERTRY. Yes — you haven't changed your opinion about this union?

THE DOCTOR. I have not changed my opinion.

BERTRY. Just the same — you ought to be very certain about what you say when you take such responsibilities upon yourself.

THE DOCTOR. I take them without the least hesitation.

BERTRY. Here is Dr. Richon.

[*Dr. Richon enters. He is an old country doctor. He wears a white tie, but does not appear at all ridiculous*]

THE DOCTOR. Well, my friend?

RICHON. I haven't been able to find any one — but I have an idea. Why doesn't Jean take matters into his own hands? Excuse me, please, for calling him Jean. I saw him come into the world.

THE DOCTOR. Jean would never want to.

RICHON. It would be wonderful for his health.

The Doctor. I agree with you. [*He rings the bell*] But you shall see for yourself. [*To Rosalie*] Tell Monsieur Jean I want to speak to him. [*Rosalie goes*]

Richon. I shall be so glad to shake hands with him! I have now been practicing for more than thirty years in his birthplace, Ébreville. I helped a bit in bringing him up. I was both his mother's and his father's physician, alas!

[*Jean enters from the right. He is twenty-eight years old, and has a very sad face*]

Jean. How do you do, my good doctor?

Richon. How are you, my dear boy? [*They shake hands*]

The Doctor. Sit down. There are three of us here who are very fond of you: your uncle, Dr. Richon, and I. We were talking about you — and we were wondering why you yourself would not take care of your lands at Ébreville.

Jean. I?

Richon. Yes.

Jean. What would be the good of it?

Bertry. But, my Lord, I'd understand your attitude if you only got some good out of your life here in Paris.

Jean. You find Paris gay?

Bertry. Of course.

Richon. If you do not care for Paris, why

do you refuse to go down to Ébreville? The air is much better there than here. I am sure that you would feel better, too. Don't you think so, dear master?

THE DOCTOR. Obviously. Besides, it is now quite the thing to be a country gentleman. One hunts, rides — and Ébreville is but an hour away from Dieppe.

BERTRY. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

JEAN. But why do you want me to go down there into all that confusion?

RICHON. In order to safeguard your fortune.

BERTRY. That's the reason.

JEAN. Yes — you are right, I feel that I ought to follow your advice, but I haven't the power really to want to. And besides, I shall always have enough to give me all that I desire. So what is the good of it?

BERTRY. What is the good of it? That is your answer to everything. For that matter, what is the good of living?

JEAN. I ask myself that very question.

RICHON. You'll make yourself ill.

JEAN. I am ill now.

RICHON. Very ill.

JEAN. All the better!

BERTRY. I tell you, the youth of today is happy! You are the last of the romanticists,

my dear fellow, and you speak like one of Chateaubriand's heroes. But for heaven's sake, do something, laugh!

JEAN. You think that is possible?

BERTRY. You only have to want to do it.

RICHON. If you are confident that you will be cured you will get well.

JEAN. Just as some people are born hunch-backed, I was born sad. They can wish in vain to become straight. They never will be!

THE DOCTOR. You see, my dear Richon, nothing can be done. Are you going to spend several days in Paris?

RICHON. No. I am returning this evening — I have two little rogues coming into the world in Ébreville.

THE DOCTOR. Should you like to visit my clinic?

RICHON. I should very much like to.

THE DOCTOR. Here is my card. My secretary, Dr. La Belleuse, will act as your guide. *Au revoir*, my good Richon. [*Richon goes out*]

BERTRY. A carriage has just driven up. It is Madame de Cattenières.

THE DOCTOR. I'm going — she will ask for a consultation. Stay here, Jean — and you, tell Lucienne. [*He goes*]

JEAN. [*To Bertry*] Will you allow me to? Stay here a moment.

BERTRY. Are you afraid of being left alone with Madame de Cattenières?

JEAN. Almost.

[*Mme. de Cattenières enters*]

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. How do you do, Monsieur Bertry — and you, Monsieur Jean? How glad I am to see you! And Lucienne — she is well? — all the better! I can't stand it any longer. Thank heavens the season to go to the seashore is almost here. I don't know whether I can hold out to the end. I'll have to tell you my programme for the day.

BERTRY. I'll go get Lucienne, who would be sorry not to hear it. Will you excuse me?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Yes, go — Monsieur Jean will keep me company.

BERTRY. He will be charmed, I am sure. [*He goes*]

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Is it true — that you will be charmed? I should so love to have a long talk with you! You are sad. Oh, do not try to deny it! You know women notice those things immediately — I always thought that you fostered a silent *grande passion.*

THE SERVANT. Monsieur and Madame Longuyon. [*They enter — Madame Longuyon is a pretty, vivacious woman*]

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. My dear friend! How are you, Monsieur Longuyon — [*There is*

a short conversation at the doorway. During this time Jean goes out] Lucienne will be here in a moment, so sit down — Monsieur Jean and I were just saying — Why he's gone, the rascal — We were talking of the Lombard-Dubois — You were there last night? What a lovely affair it was!

LONGUYON. Yes, but it lasted too long.

MME. LONGUYON. You should have gone home alone.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Of course.

LONGUYON. And left my wife among those youngsters? No, Madame de Cattenières, I am not that type of a husband.

MME. LONGUYON. As it was, we left before the end of the cotillion.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Was the cotillion gay?

MME. LONGUYON. Very gay.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Why of course, it must have been, since it was led by Dr. La Belleuse, who is the best cotillion leader of the times.

THE SERVANT. Dr. La Belleuse. [*La Belleuse enters*]

LA BELLEUSE. Are you laughing about me? [*To Longuyon, who has risen*] Hello, Longuyon!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. It was about you — I was saying to Monsieur Longuyon that you

must be a great success with your pretty patients.

La Belleuse. [*In spite of himself, he imitates Dr. Bertry's manner of speech during the following*] You are making an error, madame, that almost every one makes. A regrettable error. A doctor's office is not a boudoir, I assure you; it is a confessional for human miseries, and when love is spoken of there, the subject is a good deal less amusing than you can possibly imagine. For us a patient is not a woman, but simply a sick person, and there you are!

Mme. de Cattenières. I beg your pardon.

Longuyon. You are a good man, doctor! [*Softly*] I have a word to say to you. Listen — my wife cannot make up her mind to go and see you, although I have begged her to — and her health troubles me. Will you take advantage of this meeting to give her a lecture? It would be awfully kind of you.

La Belleuse. I shall be very glad to.

[*Longuyon takes La Belleuse up to where his wife is. She has turned a bit away*]

Longuyon. I'll leave you here!

[*He returns to Mme. de Cattenières, excuses himself, and walks to the fireplace, upon which he leans his elbow. From here he makes signs*

to La Belleuse who is standing next to Mme. Longuyon]

La Belleuse. [*To Mme. Longuyon in a low voice*] I waited for you, Helene, all yesterday afternoon.

Mme. Longuyon. I could not come.

La Belleuse. Then you do not love me?

Mme. Longuyon. You know very well that I do! You are smiling?

La Belleuse. Yes, your husband is making signs of encouragement to me.

[*La Belleuse smiles at Longuyon and nods his head, as if to say: "Everything will be all right"*]

Longuyon. [*To Mme. de Cattenières*] That Dr. La Belleuse has a heart of gold.

Mme. de Cattenières. [*Who has been watching all the proceedings*] Hasn't he, though?

Longuyon. Are you doing the honors here? I'm not complaining that you are, remember!

Mme. de Cattenières. Lucienne is coming.

Longuyon. And her father?

Mme. de Cattenières. He is probably with his brother.

Longuyon. I have always wondered how two people so entirely different as the doctor and his brother could live together. Monsieur Bertry made his fortune in business, didn't he?

Mme. de Cattenières. Not exactly; he rebuilt it there, for at the age of twenty-five

he had squandered his part of his inheritance.

LONGUYON. Ah! Women?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. No — just one woman! That is, the others did not come until later.

LONGUYON. He did not try to reform?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. On the contrary. He had them all, from country ladies to his own factory workers — faugh!

LONGUYON. Don Juan!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. A Don Juan, manufacturing woolens — that's what he is.

LONGUYON. And his wife never knew —

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. His wife?

LONGUYON. Madame Bertry?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. You knew Madame Bertry?

LONGUYON. No.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Your wife knew her?

LONGUYON. Don't bother her.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. That's right. If you know nothing about it, let's consider that I have said nothing.

LONGUYON. Then there is something?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Nothing. Dear Lucienne is making us wait a long while.

LONGUYON. Perhaps she is working with her uncle. They tell me that she acts as his secretary.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. And why not? Doctor Bertry loves to dictate, and his latest works on heredity have been entirely transcribed by Lucienne.

LONGUYON. What a charming girl she is!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Isn't she, though? A bit eccentric. She gets that from her mother.

LONGUYON. You know her then?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Who, the mother?

LONGUYON. Yes.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. She is dead.

LONGUYON. Well, then, did you know her?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. [*Shocked*] I! — Heavens, no! — But you will not make me tell you what I would rather not talk about — Of all the young girls I know I love Lucienne best.

LONGUYON. She is a good match.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Of course!

LONGUYON. Wasn't she to be married some time ago?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. To Paul de Maucour?

LONGUYON. Yes.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Why surely. A very natural indiscretion, however, stopped everything.

LONGUYON. An indiscretion?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. And Paul de Mau-

cour married Alice, Lucienne's best friend. But that's all old. They have returned from their honeymoon and have even called on Lucienne, and she was very glad to see them.

LONGUYON. You don't mean it! He took his wife to visit his former fiancée?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Paul de Maucour is one of Jean Belmont's class mates.

LONGUYON. Nevertheless —

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. But it was Lucienne who wanted them to come.

LONGUYON. A propos of this broken engagement, you were speaking of an indiscretion.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. You are getting wrong ideas into your head. I see that the best thing to do is to tell you everything. Well, Lucienne's mother was one of the prominent cocottes of the end of the Empire: there you are, now — that's everything! [*Lucienne enters*] Why, here is Lucienne! [*She goes to her*] How do you do, my dear? It has seemed a long while, in spite of the company of this gentleman, who is a chatterer. But you look superb!

LUCIENNE. [*To Mme. de Cattenières*] Please excuse me — but we have had to hurry our departure for Ébreville. How do you do, La Belleuse? Please don't get up. [*She shakes hands with Mme. Longuyon and La Belleuse*]

Please don't move! [*She joins Mme. de Cattenières*] Yes, my dear!

LONGUYON. [*Goes on his tiptoes to the center table and takes up an album. La Belleuse and Mme. Longuyon move slightly*] I'm going to look at the pictures.

[*He goes to the rear table and sits down*]

LUCIENNE. [*To Mme. de Cattenières*] I'll tell you what has been keeping me — there are a lot of good people down at Ébreville to whom I take clothes and good things to eat every time I go down there. If they should see me arrive with empty hands —

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. You don't mean to say that *you* do that sort of thing?

LUCIENNE. [*A little nervous*] You are surprised? You never thought that I could dream of anything but clothes, say anything but trivialities, or do anything but flirt!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Not at all, I assure you.

LUCIENNE. Come, come! Now don't try to get out of it. And you are not the only one who thinks so. After all, you are right. And when I do other things I meddle with what isn't my business. But let us talk of you! How have you been?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Not well. At one

time I have a voracious appetite, and then I cannot eat at all.

[*They continue speaking in a low voice*]

Mme. Longuyon. [*Rising, to La Belleuse*] No — I say no. You see — this idea of dividing myself between my husband and you revolts me.

La Belleuse. If that is all —

Mme. Longuyon. What do you mean, if that is all!

La Belleuse. You'll see.

[*He approaches Longuyon and takes him by the arm. Mme. Longuyon joins Lucienne*]

Lucienne. Alice de Maucour! Is she still my best friend? Of course! And why not?

Mme. de Cattenières. And her husband?

Lucienne. He is also still one of my friends, my dear.

Mme. de Cattenières. You knew it, Madame Longuyon?

Mme. Longuyon. Why, surely!

Lucienne. He is still one of my friends, and if you will stay here a little while longer you will be able to see for yourself, for I know that both of them are coming to bid me goodbye.

Mme. de Cattenières. I have been told —

Lucienne. There are so many people with evil tongues!

La Belleuse. [*To Longuyon, drawing him up*

the stage] My dear man, I have had a long talk with your wife.

LONGUYON. Well?

LA BELLEUSE. You are right. Her apparent good health is only on the surface. She needs a great deal of care, a great deal of care.

LONGUYON. That is what I thought.

LA BELLEUSE. But even more than you imagine. [*They continue speaking softly*]

LONGUYON. Very well, I promise you.

LA BELLEUSE. Well and good! [*They shake hands. To Lucienne*] I am leaving now, and I want to wish you a very pleasant trip.

LUCIENNE. Good-bye — Good-bye.

[*La Belleuse goes out*]

THE SERVANT. Monsieur and Madame de Maucour.

[*Alice embraces Lucienne. Paul shakes hands with her and then greets Mme. de Cattenières*]

ALICE. How are you?

LUCIENNE. And you?

ALICE. I am so glad to be with you again.

LUCIENNE. And I am glad to have you here.

ALICE. You know that we are going to Dieppe this year.

LUCIENNE. Then we shall see one another.

ALICE. I should think so!

LUCIENNE. Ébreville is seven and a half miles from Dieppe.

ALICE. A half hour by bicycle.

LUCIENNE. Do you ride?

ALICE. Yes, with Paul. We love it.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. I am going, my dear Lucienne. I don't want to intrude on two such good friends.

LUCIENNE. You are not intruding —

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. I am just fooling. I want to try to catch Dr. La Belleuse and see whether he can tell me what's the matter with me.

ALICE. Are you ill, my dear?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. At one time I have a voracious appetite, and then I cannot eat at all. I am going to tell the doctor about it. Please do not rise. [*She goes*]

ALICE. I can hardly believe, when I see us two here, that it is I who am the "madame" — Who ever would have thought that I should be the first to marry!

LUCIENNE. Why not?

ALICE. [*Carelessly*] Oh, my dear, but you are older than I am! [*A pause*] You will never guess what people have told me: that you were to marry Paul. Of course I laughed!

LUCIENNE. You should not have — for it is true.

ALICE. You don't really mean it!

LUCIENNE. Why, yes —

ALICE. Were things pretty far advanced?

LUCIENNE. Far enough!

ALICE. Did your relatives plan it?

LUCIENNE. No, we did — we were in love with each other.

ALICE. Ah!

LUCIENNE. Probably seeing you was enough for him.

ALICE. That probably would have sufficed; but your engagement was already broken when he met me. Why was it broken?

LUCIENNE. I don't know.

ALICE. Listen, dear Lucienne, I have something to tell you. You have a lot of enemies, and people are saying nasty things about you.

LUCIENNE. [*Raising her voice a little*] About me? What do they say? I beg you to tell me what they say.

ALICE. Do not talk so loud. It's not exactly about you that people are talking — and besides, what they say is so improbable. And finally, I don't understand about such things at all — I was told — I am telling you this in your interest — I was told that when Paul's parents refused their consent to your marriage it was not on your account.

LUCIENNE. It was on account of my mother, wasn't it?

ALICE. [*Embarrassed*] Not exactly.

LUCIENNE. That's all right. I did not know that, and I thank you for telling me about it.

ALICE. Anyway, you need not feel any great regrets; for if Paul had really loved you deeply, as you deserved, he would have done more to overcome his parents' remonstrances. But I appear to be monopolizing you. You are not angry with me, are you? [*She rises, and approaches the Longuyons*]

LUCIENNE. No — [*Paul de Maucour approaches Lucienne*] Monsieur de Maucour?

PAUL. Mademoiselle Lucienne!

LUCIENNE. A word, please! Won't people say that you are running after me?

PAUL. I have been made to treat you so badly, Lucienne, that I was waiting for you to reproach me.

LUCIENNE. Bah! It makes little difference to me.

PAUL. I loved you a great deal, Lucienne!

LUCIENNE. [*Softly*] And I too, I loved you!

PAUL. And I still love you — I ask your forgiveness — I should not speak like this to a young girl.

LUCIENNE. Oh, nonsense! Am I a young girl like the others?

PAUL. Yes. But better than the others. The man who gets you for a wife may consider himself lucky.

LUCIENNE. Do not say what you do not really believe. Besides, I shall never marry.

PAUL. Have you so little love in you?

LUCIENNE. But I did not say that —

PAUL. Then you love me?

[*Jean enters. Lucienne bursts into a loud laugh, then she says softly*]

LUCIENNE. You are a fool! — What is there new in Paris? Do you go to the theater?

PAUL. Yesterday I took Alice to the *Casino des Larbins.*

LUCIENNE. Where?

PAUL. Oh, it's quite the place to go now-a-days. You see every one there. You should see the line of carriages that stands in front every night.

LUCIENNE. What is the attraction?

PAUL. A pantomime: *The Night in the Seraglio.*

LUCIENNE. And that is? [*She snaps her fingers*]

PAUL. [*Looks at her in a surprised manner. Smiling*] You have become quite modernized during the last six months.

LUCIENNE. You think so? I tell you, it was not hard for me to change.

PAUL. Ah!

LUCIENNE. Yes.

[*A pause, during which Paul is visibly embarrassed*]

PAUL. You were asking me? I really don't remember what any more —

LUCIENNE. I was asking you about the pantomime — is it rather free?

PAUL. One can go only if one takes a box.

LUCIENNE. I am sorry that I am not married. If I were I should immediately go to see your masterpiece.

PAUL. If there were not so many conventions —

LUCIENNE. [*Laughing loudly*] I might go with you some evening?

PAUL. I did not say that.

LUCIENNE. I should hope not.

PAUL. Shall we be good friends — Lucienne?

LUCIENNE. [*Giving him her hand*] As good as you wish.

PAUL. [*Holding her hand*] You are more adorable than ever and I love you more than I ever did before.

LUCIENNE. [*Releasing her hand*] And in another way.

ALICE. [*Coming up to them*] I am sorry to have to interrupt you — but you know, Paul, that they are waiting for us. [*To Lucienne*] Good-bye, my dear, and *bon voyage.*

LUCIENNE. Then it's understood that we shall see you at Ébreville?

ALICE. Unless, by chance, we should not go to Dieppe.

[*Lucienne takes them to the door. Longuyon and his wife join them, and all say good-bye*]

JEAN. You should not compromise yourself thus, Lucienne.

LUCIENNE. And why, pray?

JEAN. You should not jest with Paul de Maucour as you do, and you should not allow him to speak to you as he does.

LUCIENNE. That appears to be my business.

JEAN. You are wrong. It is also your friends' business.

LUCIENNE. I haven't any friends: or rather I have so many; which amounts to none at all.

JEAN. You have at least one good one.

LUCIENNE. You?

JEAN. Me.

LUCIENNE. After all, perhaps that is true, for I cannot see any reason why you should lie to me about it.

JEAN. Your actions, however, affect my friendship for you.

LUCIENNE. Because?

JEAN. Because you are preparing yourself for unhappiness.

LUCIENNE. Do you think so?

JEAN. Seeing you so inconsistent, who do you think will marry you?

LUCIENNE. And who tells you, pray, that I want to marry?

JEAN. You hate the idea of marriage?

LUCIENNE. I do not hate it; but it is forbidden to me.

JEAN. What do you mean?

LUCIENNE. It's true that you are not interested in the scandal of the day. We have not met much. You do not like to talk, you never leave your room, where your misanthropy keeps you; you have not been in Paris long and you do not know things about me that the whole world is talking of. Well! Now you shall learn the state of affairs! A man can make me his mistress but never his wife. However, I am not any worse than other young girls; I was not more perverted than Alice, my former friend, and Paul de Maucour married her. But, on account of my birth, I am doomed to evil.

JEAN. [*Moved*] By your birth! Will you please explain?

LUCIENNE. What good will that do?

JEAN. Well, I, I, too, am doomed to evil, and through no fault of mine.

LUCIENNE. I received at birth a fatal heritage.

JEAN. I also am crushed by a fatal heritage, as you call it. My father transmitted to me the melancholy which poisoned him through

life. Ah, Lucienne, tell me your troubles; no one, no one can understand them better than I.

LUCIENNE. I have to carry the burden of my mother's indiscretions. She transmitted to me all the sadness of her life — no, I am wrong, she gave to me repentance for her pleasures, for she led a gay life, and it is I who am punished.

JEAN. Do not speak like that of your mother, Lucienne.

LUCIENNE. [*Rising*] Ah, yes! The conventional filial respect! You see, I was never taught that. My father loves me in his way, he does what he can for me. It's not his fault that his pleasures have always taken up the greater part of his time. It is true that he recognized me, but he has always left the problem of my education in his brother's hands. As to my mother, I have already let you imagine what she was. Filial respect! Believe that I am a monster, if you will, but I have searched in every corner of my heart — still I cannot find that respect there!

JEAN. I do not dare — I cannot ask you to explain.

LUCIENNE. In order to have you understand it will only be necessary for me to mention my mother's name, for she was celebrated. Twenty-five years ago the daily papers mentioned her

name a million times; why, even pamphlets were published with her picture and an account of her life — I would have blushed to read them even if she had been a total stranger to me — Her name was Sophie Claret; I look like her; I have her mannerisms, the same vocal intonations — an old friend of my father's told me so — and I have her spirit, too.

JEAN. How did you come to know all this?

LUCIENNE. It was a long time ago. I was expelled from a convent after I had been there but a week. They made some sort of an excuse; but a little friend of mine who did not understand what she was saying, told me that I had been expelled because I was the daughter of Sophie Claret. You know what that means to a young girl. At first, I was very much surprised, then I forgot about it. However, I already felt that I was different from the average. My uncle would often stop my father when he scolded me. He would say: "Leave the poor child alone; you cannot make her over, she has it in her blood." I can still remember — I think I was seventeen when I overheard this conversation between two young people: — "Lucienne Bertry — there is nothing to fear with her. One can't be compelled to marry her." I heard nothing more excepting the name of my mother. Finally, four years ago,

in opening a paper, — I don't know where I got it from — that same name met my eyes. This time I wanted to know. By making a little effort, with the help of a few tricks, I cannot tell you just how, I was finally enlightened —

JEAN. Poor little girl!

LUCIENNE. Yes, poor little girl! Two years ago Paul de Maucour proposed marriage to me. Then he suddenly disappeared, and when he returned he was married to Alice. I immediately knew the reason.

JEAN. On account of your mother's name?

LUCIENNE. Eh! It's not a question of her name! But people are afraid that I am exactly like her, do you understand? And deep down I am afraid that they are right. I have written, from my uncle's dictation, his latest works on heredity. Can you now guess with what eagerness I have listened during the last four years to his lectures on heredity — implacable heredity, as he calls it? Can you understand with what eagerness I have read and reread all of his books? There are times, however, when I ask myself whether they are right, with all their science — for at balls, during flirtations, more than once, I have felt rebellion and loathing rise up in my breast. What they called love disgusted me. But I honestly

thought that I should not play the prude and I strained to overcome my loathings — I succeeded — and just a little while ago I listened, smilingly, to words which formerly would have driven me almost mad.

JEAN. Lucienne!

LUCIENNE. I really dreamed of other things — I thought that my happiness in later life would be in devoting myself to some one whom I loved — for whom I should have the affection that one has for little children — for, in my mind, this some one was weak —

JEAN. [*Who has listened with the greatest emotion, and who now sits down close to her*] Unhappy?

LUCIENNE. Yes.

JEAN. Like me, Lucienne?

LUCIENNE. Like you. He would have to be cared for more carefully than any one else in the world.

JEAN. [*Putting his hands before his face*] Lucienne! Lucienne!

LUCIENNE. Jean!

JEAN. I suffer the same as you do — I was three years old when my father committed suicide —

LUCIENNE. I was three years old when my mother died.

JEAN. I also have read all of Dr. Bertry's

books, and like you, Lucienne, I am in despair! Our unhappiness is the same.

LUCIENNE. Yes, the same.

JEAN. My life is lost.

LUCIENNE. Mine too!

JEAN. I long for death to set me free!

LUCIENNE. I have not the right even to dream of the happiness that belongs to every woman. [*Sobbing*] But truly, Jean, truly, do you not think that it is sad, very sad, that there are human beings who are fated even before their birth to be consecrated to all the bitterness, all the disasters of life? Isn't it unjust, isn't it more than unjust?

JEAN. Yes, it is unjust; unjust and unfortunate that we are locked in the faults and vices of our ancestors.

LUCIENNE. It is like original sin —

JEAN. For which we are punished —

LUCIENNE. Without having committed it — How well I understood your sadness!

JEAN. And how I understand yours! We are like two exiles who meet —

LUCIENNE. Glad to speak of their native land, of their common misfortune —

JEAN. [*Resting his head on Lucienne's shoulder*] And weep in each other's arms.

LUCIENNE. [*Stroking his hair*] Yes, as we

are doing! And, for a moment, their suffering would be lessened —

[*A pause. Both gradually become exalted during the following*]

JEAN. Lucienne — these chains — these chains which the dead have hung on us — if we tried to break them?

LUCIENNE. [*Shows signs of great joy, then:*] — Impossible — we are prisoners to whom all hope is denied —

JEAN. There is no prison from which an escape is impossible. [*He rises*] If you want to — we will try to escape.

LUCIENNE. It is impossible!

JEAN. No, it is not. Alone, the idea would never have struck me, and I certainly should have lacked the strength to realise it. But with your help — both united in life — for I love you, Lucienne, and I have loved you for a long time.

LUCIENNE. I know now. I know that I have loved you — for a long time already. For the husband of my dreams was like you.

JEAN. We will put the energy of our youth and the power of our love against their despairing science!

LUCIENNE. I want to — but I am afraid! If we were mistaken, Jean, and if I could not escape!

JEAN. I would love you so —

LUCIENNE. I am afraid of the influence of the dead.

JEAN. You will forget it — I will make you forget it. Besides, you will save me. Already I feel that I have more strength.

LUCIENNE. Ah, Jean! If it were possible! What happiness! If it were only possible!

JEAN. We are going to use every atom of our strength to combat it. Do you consent?

LUCIENNE. I consent.

JEAN. [*Holding her hands, and speaking with effusion*] But I shall have to act immediately. We shall have to make our projects known immediately. I want to profit by this awakening, this exaltation — for if I should wait I should be afraid that I might not have the power again. I am going to speak to your father. I told him a long while ago that I wanted to marry you; but at that time I had no real energy, for I did not know that you loved me. Ah, how happy we are going to be! [*He goes — Dr. Bertry enters*]

THE DOCTOR. Have all your callers gone?

LUCIENNE. Yes.

THE DOCTOR. You are satisfied to go to Ébreville?

LUCIENNE. Charmed, charmed, charmed!

THE DOCTOR. Why what is the matter with you? You are so excited!

LUCIENNE. You will know very soon. A serious event is going to take place in my life.

THE DOCTOR. [*Without attaching much significance to her words*] Serious! — serious, and at the same time happy?

LUCIENNE. Yes, happy!

THE DOCTOR. All the better, all the better!

[*Lucienne goes out — Dr. Bertry is alone for a short while. Then Dr. La Belleuse enters with Dr. Richon and Dr. Morienval*]

LA BELLEUSE. Come in, my dear friends. Come in! [*To Dr. Bertry*] Dear master, I am bringing Dr. Richon and our other colleague, Dr. Morienval, who, having heard of your departure, has come to pay his respects.

RICHON. Dear master — I have been astonished! Ah, the Parisians are lucky indeed in possessing establishments managed like those I have seen — for they must have cost —

LA BELLEUSE. The Parisians are luckier still, however, to receive in them treatment by Dr. Bertry.

THE DOCTOR. Gratuitously.

MORIENVAL. Gratuitously.

THE DOCTOR. [*To Morienval*] And you have just had your thesis accepted, sir?

MORIENVAL. Yes, dear master. My father

said to me: "Be either a lawyer or a doctor; if you are not successful, you can always turn to politics."

La Belleuse. By Jove, it's wonderful what power we exercise over others.

Richon. Oh, power!

La Belleuse. Our mere title gives it to us. You don't believe it? There is not a person on earth who, once knowing what we are, will not feel troubled if we look at them a bit insistently. Try it at the dinner table, at the theater, or wherever you like. Look fixedly at one of your friends who is in good health. Say to him with a certain air: "Are you feeling well?" He will be troubled, and his "yes" will already be full of anxiety. He will entreat you to tell him what you have noticed. Then reply: "Oh, nothing! I thought that you were a bit pale. Is your heart action perfectly all right?" And the next day that friend will be at your office, after having passed a sleepless night. He will ask you, with the naiveté of all sick people, to give him a new heart in the place of his.

Morienval. Does that sort of thing happen in the country, Dr. Richon?

Richon. Oh, it's quite different in the country, you know — there, we love our work for its own sake. And besides, we are a bit

friendly with our patients. In Ébreville, almost every one who bows to me on the street has been helped into the world by me; I have been present at their weddings, and have seen their parents die.

La Belleuse. You lose a great many of your cases?

Richon. Not any more than one does here in Paris. I realise that I am not a savant, but I have seen so many that I am beginning to know them a little.

Morienval. And are you perfectly contented?

Richon. Heavens — I hardly dare to confess it here — I am proud of being a physician — I always feel a keen pleasure when, after I have entered a patient's room and found every one in tears, I have been able to leave with the consciousness that I have given a little hope. For, you know, a physician cures but rarely, relieves sometimes, but always consoles. The patients —

La Belleuse. Ah, the patients! For all the gratitude that they show —

Richon. Of course — they are often ungrateful.

La Belleuse. Often! Always, you meant to say.

Richon. I divide them into two classes: first, those whom I treat gratuitously, for I love

to do that; then come the patients who pay me. If I should ask for remuneration from both I should feel that I was being paid twice. And besides — my patients — I like to please them — that helps cure them.

La Belleuse. [*To Morienval*] He belongs to the old school.

Richon. [*Who has not heard*] I graduated from Caen.

The Doctor. I only hope that there are a lot of physicians like you!

Richon. You are making fun of me now — I am going to leave at once — you see, the train will not wait for me.

The Doctor. I hope to see you again one of these days, Richon.

[*Richon leaves. La Belleuse and Morienval laugh*]

La Belleuse. He's a fine one!

Morienval. The consolation of the parents!

La Belleuse. And his joy — his joy when his patients are feeling better!

Morienval. A doctor who is afraid of being paid twice!

La Belleuse. When one has enough trouble in getting paid once!

Morienval. And from Caen!

The Doctor. Come, come now! You might be just a little indulgent. What do you

expect? He is from the country — and doesn't know!

[*Bertry enters*]

BERTRY. How do you do, gentlemen. Kindly pardon the intrusion. [*Softly to his brother*] Are you going to be busy much longer with these gentlemen? I have something very important to tell you!

THE DOCTOR. No, we have quite finished.

[*La Belleuse and Morienval bid him good-bye with much ceremony*]

THE DOCTOR. What have you to tell me that is so important?

BERTRY. Jean and Lucienne want to marry.

THE DOCTOR. I thought that I had said once for all that I was opposed to their marriage.

BERTRY. Jean is in a terrible state of excitement. He knows now that Lucienne loves him.

THE DOCTOR. Lucienne loves him? After all, I am not surprised: degenerates seek each other out. And what did you say to it?

BERTRY. I saw them so confident, so resolute, so wrapped up in their happiness, that, after deliberation, I consented.

THE DOCTOR. You haven't any more balance than they have.

Bertry. Possibly! Then you refuse your consent?

The Doctor. Absolutely

Bertry. And why?

The Doctor. Don't you really know?

Bertry. You consented to take Lucienne under your roof in spite of her mother, and while your wife was still living. You did not then consider her unworthy to enter your family.

The Doctor. It's not a question of that.

Bertry. Kindly explain yourself.

The Doctor. Very well! Before a year is up — do you understand? — before a year — Jean will have committed suicide — and Lucienne —

Bertry. Albert!

The Doctor. My poor fellow, I do not want to make you sad. But let us talk seriously, since it is a question of the happiness of these children, and do not take anything that I may say as a reproach for past conduct. Jean, like his father, is nervous and melancholy. As to Lucienne, understand me — she also has a heritage which prevents her from marrying.

Bertry. [*Crushed*] We are, then, prisoners of the dead?

The Doctor. You have said it.

BERTRY. [*Becomes furious*] You'll drive me crazy in the end with your science, your heredity! So men are nothing but unconscious brutes, without individuality, without will?

THE DOCTOR. You don't understand anything about such things!

BERTRY. Well, take us for example. You and I are sons of the same parents, and we should resemble one another; however —

THE DOCTOR. There are such things as cross heredity — there is atavism, a distant heredity.

BERTRY. But why is it that what is true for us is not true for them?

THE DOCTOR. It could have been. But one needs only to watch them for an hour to see that they are just like their parents.

BERTRY. But your science is wrong sometimes; and there are always exceptions.

THE DOCTOR. Very few — Lucas, Morel, Galton and I have observed thousands of cases which showed the laws of heredity —

BERTRY. And how many cases, where these laws were shattered, did you not know about? You know the number of condemned thieves whose fathers were also condemned, but you do not know how many criminals there are whose children are perfectly honest. And even though your laws, your famous laws, might have

been shattered but once, even though, through all of your observations you might have found but one vicious man whose offspring was not vicious, but one fool whose children were sane, I tell you that that one, that one and only case, should have stopped you from publishing on the strength of such doubtful authority, your sinister and bold laws, your hopeless laws, which, perhaps, have succeeded in making more vicious and insane people than heredity itself.

The Doctor. What matter the victims? We believe that these laws are true, we must therefore formulate them —

Bertry. You abuse your power — by being despots —

The Doctor. Despots who are not afraid of being dethroned —

Bertry. You are right. Your reign is not near its end. You are the good gods of an atheist people which has no other ideal than the perfect operation of its digestive organs. You are the last resource of credulity in this epoch of sham scepticism.

The Doctor. Go on, my friend; but I am waiting until you feel ill. You will come to me as every one else does; you will show me your tongue, and be the very little boy, just like all the others.

Bertry. That will prove nothing! Formerly,

sick people prayed to God to cure them; now that they do not believe in God any longer, they believe in science, even more than you do, and you have inherited the power of the priests.

THE DOCTOR. Has the change meant any loss?

BERTRY. I think so — now they pay.

THE DOCTOR. Oh, oh! — They pay!

BERTRY. They "sell," if you wish it thus, they sell the hope of a future life that is less sad than this one. You, you are the ministers of this goddess of deception, who calls herself science! — Medicine —

THE DOCTOR. Do not speak badly of medicine. It has had martyrs.

BERTRY. Not as many martyrs as victims!

THE DOCTOR. It has heroes.

BERTRY. I know that as well as you do; but for a Claude Bernard, a Pasteur, or a Doctor Roux, whom fame has reached in spite of themselves, locked up though they were in laboratories, for a certain number of you who are modest and to be pitied, there are enough — others — drunk with success and no longer human. I say that you sow terror behind you with your discoveries of new maladies, with your descriptions, your prescriptions, and your menaces. You belittle character in developing in

gigantic proportions the fear of death. You poison all our pleasures, all our actions, all our life.

THE DOCTOR. Our patients do not say that.

BERTRY. Your patients! I know them! I know your faithful patient; he sweats fear from every pore; all wrapped up in flannel, like a race horse, he leads a shriveled and pitiable existence. He comes to you to find out how he is to eat, drink, sleep, and even love. You have invented the fear of microbes —

THE DOCTOR. It is no worse than the fear of hell!

BERTRY. No! Fear for fear — I prefer that — for it has at times stopped evil, while your inventions have only helped to multiply egoists and rogues.

THE DOCTOR. Go on talking. Since the time of Molière we have heard many others and many who are better. As far as this concerns Jean and Lucienne, it is useless to discuss it any longer. I refuse my consent to this union, that is all there is to it!

BERTRY. Very well! Then you shall yourself give your decision to the poor children. I haven't the heart to do it.

THE DOCTOR. Very well.

[*Bertry goes to the door at the left and brings in Lucienne and Jean*]

THE DOCTOR. My children —

JEAN. You refuse?

THE DOCTOR. Yes. I am opposed to your marriage because I think that you two would be very unhappy. That is all I have to say.

JEAN. But we are absolutely convinced that the only means we have to escape from this terrible fatality that our parents have handed down to us, is to join our forces and fight against this evil.

LUCIENNE. Yes, we fully believe that by this means we may possibly be happy.

THE DOCTOR. I refuse!

JEAN. [*Softly*] If you still refuse your consent you will immediately provoke the catastrophe which you do not doubt will eventually happen.

THE DOCTOR. What do you mean by that?

JEAN. I swear by my parents to do what I have just suggested: If you do not consent I shall commit suicide!

BERTRY. Do you hear? Now do you still dare?

LUCIENNE. Be merciful, uncle!

THE DOCTOR. [*Looks at them very resolutely*] I give in. But you will remember that I have done all in my power to prevent this union. I give in, but I do so only under threat!

LUCIENNE. Jean!

JEAN. Do not be afraid, Lucienne, we will triumph! I have never felt so strong before! The life that I refused this morning — the life at Ébreville, I now accept it.

LUCIENNE. We will love each other! And with the strength of our love we will escape from this prison, in spite of you, my uncle; in spite of you, our gaoler!

THE DOCTOR. We shall see.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

A corner of the castle park at Ébreville. At the right, the steps leading up to the house; at the left, the servants' entrance.

SÉGARD. [*Alone*] One hundred francs that I'd have given to the former manager — but since he stole, he might just as well have taken a hundred francs more, and I'm not hurting him any by keeping it — four hundred francs for the dairy promised by Madame Belmont — one hundred francs for repairs — that makes six hundred — so there are two hundred coming to me.

[*Jean appears on the steps with another farmer whom he is bidding good-bye. He goes out at rear, right, after saying:* "*Good day, Monsieur Belmont.*"]

SÉGARD. How do, monsieur. You'll have to come and look at the farm. Madame Belmont promised us some repairs — you can ask her if she didn't. The 'roof'll be falling on our heads —

JEAN. [*He is very gay during this entire scene*] We'll see.

SÉGARD. The bad times is coming — the sea wind will rip it off as if it were a bit of straw.

It's not for me that I want it, it's for my wife and children. If any misfortune should come, Monsieur Jean — they'd make you pay more than it was worth, that's sure.

JEAN. All right, I'll look at it.

SÉGARD. Come with me, I have my rig.

JEAN. No, I haven't had anything to eat yet. I'll have just a bite and then I'll follow you.

SÉGARD. Then you'll not come?

JEAN. I'll be there as soon as you will.

SÉGARD. Sure?

JEAN. I promise you. Only you must be a little reasonable with my rabbits.

SÉGARD. Your rabbits! — your rabbits! — Get an expert, sir! Get an expert! They've been eating my wheat since the beginning of the season — on all of my land that borders on your woods — why one day the mayor even said to me, says he: "Have you finished with your reaping already, Ségard?"

JEAN. But why do you sow right on that bit of land — just to make me pay you?

SÉGARD. Oh, monsieur! I'm not malicious, but it's the best bit of land I own.

JEAN. And why do you put buckwheat on the next field — to attract my pheasants?

SÉGARD. [*Playing the fool*] Buckwheat? Pheasants? Which pheasants?

JEAN. You know very well that buckwheat attracts them.

SÉGARD. Buckwheat attracts them — that's the first I have heard of it. But it's true they did eat my buckwheat; you made me think of it, and I really ought to make a claim on you.

JEAN. Ah, not really!

SÉGARD. No, I'll not do it — I'll not do it.

JEAN. My warden told me that you had killed six since the opening of the season.

SÉGARD. Six — six what? Six rabbits?

JEAN. Six pheasants.

SÉGARD. Six pheasants! I killed six pheasants! Ah, good Lord! — six pheasants! But what should I have done with them? Do you suppose that poor people like us know how to eat them beasts? Do you suppose that we've got teeth for them things? What should I have done with them? I'll not leave here until you tell me what I could have done with them.

JEAN. Oh, all right — all right. Will you sell me your two bits of land?

SÉGARD. The wheat and the buckwheat land?

JEAN. Yes.

SÉGARD. Oh, I couldn't do that, Monsieur Belmont.

JEAN. Why not?

SÉGARD. Because selling land brings bad luck.

JEAN. You sold that bit at Longpré.

SÉGARD. That's not the same thing — that came to me from my sister-in-law.

[*Jean bursts out laughing. At this moment Bertry and the doctor appear on the steps*]

JEAN. So instead of getting rent I owe you money?

SÉGARD. It's not my fault, monsieur, it's the fault of them rabbits. *Au revoir.* [*They shake hands*] *Au revoir*, monsieur. What makes me feel bad though is about them six pheasants — because — the Ségards, from father to son —there are not any more honest in the whole country.

JEAN. [*Going to rear of stage with him*] I know — and the rent?

SÉGARD. Well, look here — I gave one hundred francs to the manager — you said to, didn't you?

JEAN. What's that?

[*They go out left, talking. Bertry and the doctor come down from the house and cross the stage*]

BERTRY. Well now! Isn't our friend Jean, whom you condemned to everlasting melancholy, gay enough? All that was needed to cure him

was for him to forget your somber predictions, fill his lungs with good air, and become interested in life in general. Ha! Your famous science — your infallible science — for once it is wrong! It's six months now since Jean and Lucienne were married, and see how happy they are!

THE DOCTOR. Hum?

BERTRY. Why you'd never recognize Jean again. He is intensely interested in his work as a gentleman farmer. Yesterday morning I saw him come in at nine o'clock after having had a long horseback ride; he was in radiantly good health and in the best of humor.

THE DOCTOR. Yes, Jean is certainly in better condition. He is happy and thinks that the whole world is. Out of door exercise has done him a world of good, but at heart he is still somber and jealous.

BERTRY. Oh!

THE DOCTOR. You haven't noticed anything, eh? Why, yesterday, at dinner: Lucienne was telling about her young neighbor, who came to pay her a visit when she was all alone; then Jean's face suddenly became clouded —

BERTRY. That's true!

[*Bertry again starts pacing up and down*]

THR DOCTOR. And Lucienne is bored.

BERTRY. Oh!

THE DOCTOR. Yes. At first she played the country manor lady, looking after the cultivation of her grounds and her kitchen garden. She promised repairs to all of her farmers, and Jean had to control her generosity. Then, suddenly, she lost all interest in everything. She is bored.

BERTRY. You say that she is bored? The misfortune, the misfortune which we must fear more than all else, you understand me, is that she will attribute her state of tedium not to her idleness, but rather to her destiny; and since she will believe herself condemned in advance, she will not defend herself, she will not react as every other good woman would do in her position. And if she is ever defeated it will be because of the cursed ideas you have put in her head, and not on account of heredity.

THE DOCTOR. I wish I were wrong; but, sad to say, you see that the very things that have happened here only go to prove what I said. But I shall never see the final result!

BERTRY. What do you mean?

THE DOCTOR. I haven't much longer to live.

BERTRY. Oh, come now. I thought that you were feeling better.

THE DOCTOR. The pain returns and gets worse every night.

BERTRY. Just what do you feel?

The Doctor. All of a sudden, without any premonitory symptoms, I feel a terrible pain around my heart. Then the sensation of immediate death. These symptoms make me think of a known malady, but other symptoms again throw me entirely off the track. Once the crisis is over, I fall into a remarkable physical and mental depression; then, when circulation is reestablished I am again the same as before my attack, with all my will power, intelligence —

Bertry. What do you do for it?

The Doctor. Nothing. If I only dared consult Dr. Richon.

Bertry. But why don't you?

The Doctor. He would think that I was making fun of him. And then, — but let's not talk of it any longer; nothing irritates me more than to have to think of it. A physician must never be ill. His patients are such egoists and such fools that they lose all confidence in him after he has once been ill. They want to cry out to him: "Cure yourself, healer!" With absurd logic they reason that if we do not know how to relieve ourselves we are ignoramuses. I have a patient here in Ébreville who has the same sickness that I have. In some way he guessed that I too was ill. And you cannot imagine with what ferocity he asks me for news.

He observes me with mad attention; he tries to guess from my face whether I am a little better, in order to know whether I have discovered something for myself by which he can profit.

Bertry. I know who it is: it's Monsieur Brinvillard.

The Doctor. You are right. Some time ago I had a period of relief from my complaint. Wanting to comfort him I told him that I had really found a new remedy for his ailment. He believed it, the fool, he believed it! And he had two weeks of comfort, while I never sufered so much during my whole life as I did then. When he found it out, he left me.

Bertry. He has changed physicians three times since then. He has also consulted a homeopathist. Do you know what he is doing now?

The Doctor. No.

Bertry. He is consulting a sort of quack, a healer, a shepherd from the districts, called père Guernoche.

The Doctor. [*Smiling*] He was sure to come to that.

[*They go out at rear. Rosalie has entered at the left. She sets the table. Jean enters from the left*]

JEAN. Ah, Rosalie, so the manager left all the farms in ruins?

ROSALIE. You must not listen to the farmers, monsieur — they are all thieves.

JEAN. And madame — is she up yet?

ROSALIE. I think so. She is getting dressed.

JEAN. Very well! Lucienne! Lucienne! come down, you lazy bones!

[*The window opens and Lucienne appears*]

LUCIENNE. What's the matter?

JEAN. I am starved — are you coming down?

LUCIENNE. Yes, immediately. [*She disappears*]

JEAN. Is the tea ready?

ROSALIE. Yes, monsieur.

JEAN. And my soup?

ROSALIE. [*Laughing*] I cannot get used to seeing you eat soup in the morning just like a real farmer.

JEAN. But I am one, Rosalie, I am one. And some sausage, eh? with good fresh butter. I've been up, you know, since six o'clock. [*Seeing Lucienne on the steps*] I am not like madame — who does not come down until ten o'clock —

LUCIENNE. What do I do?

JEAN. Good morning, my dear.

LUCIENNE. Good morning.

[*They kiss each other. Rosalie goes out, but*

appears off and on during the following scene]

JEAN. Sit down — let's hurry!

[*He sits on the left side of the table, Lucienne opposite*]

LUCIENNE. You are still in a hurry?

JEAN. I should think so. Père Ségard is waiting for me. [*To Rosalie, who is pouring Lucienne's tea*] Tell them to hitch up the buggy immediately.

ROSALIE. Yes, monsieur. [*She goes*]

LUCIENNE. Let us go for a horseback ride.

JEAN. Impossible, my dear.

LUCIENNE. Ah!

JEAN. I promised Ségard. The roof may fall on their heads any day, you know! And then I'm going to lose a day anyway when the Grandprés come.

LUCIENNE. They have written that they are not coming.

JEAN. Perhaps they are ill?

LUCIENNE. No. They do not want their "young ladies" to come into contact with me. A propos of I don't know what, I heard Monsieur Grandpré the other day cite the proverb: "Like mother, like daughter."

JEAN. You silly girl, you're getting false notions into your head.

LUCIENNE. No. Only I think of what my uncle said.

JEAN. Oh, nonsense! But since they are not coming I shall profit by that fact and go to Rouen to see a reaping-machine binder that I have heard about.

LUCIENNE. You ought to take a rest.

JEAN. Rest! But I am taking a rest while I am doing these things. You see, when one takes up agriculture one has not a minute to oneself. And it is so good to have something to do, to feel that one is really living. One is either happy, or one is hungry. Ah, here is Rosalie! [*Rosalie has entered with some soup*] Look and see how appetizing it is. And it smells so good!

ROSALIE. You eat with relish, monsieur. [*A pause*] When one is very tired, a small bottle of wine added to this soup is very good. — I am just mentioning it to you! Good wine, of course! [*Jean and Lucienne laugh*] Don't you want some?

JEAN. No thank you, Rosalie.

[*Rosalie leaves*]

ROSALIE. [*As she goes out, aside*] What a shame! And I wanted to go to the wine cellar myself.

LUCIENNE. [*Looking at Jean in a friendly manner*] You are enjoying it?

JEAN. Heavens, I am hungry as a wolf! Do you know what I have done this morning.—

First, I walked to the *Fonds-de-Chaux*, then, to Charpentier's; from there I came back to Sanville, from Sanville to the Quartre-Chemins; I was back here at nine, and saw my farmers. Today is *Saint Michel*. Did you know that?

LUCIENNE. No. Haven't the Paris papers come?

JEAN. No, but you'll find the *Dieppe Look-out* and the *Agricultural Progress* on my table.

LUCIENNE. Thank you. Do you have to do all these things yourself?

JEAN. I should think so! And besides, I adore it!

LUCIENNE. As a matter of fact — you leave me quite alone. — And it becomes a bit tiresome.

JEAN. But why, you are not bored! We are very happy. Aren't we?

LUCIENNE. [*Dreaming*] Yes.

JEAN. Ah, that's better. Good butter — a bit of sausage — and then for the road again! I was quite tired out!

LUCIENNE. Why didn't you ride Poulette?

JEAN. She is lame — I think I'd like a bicycle.

LUCIENNE. Ah, yes. Buy one for me, too, will you?

JEAN. To make up for the fact that the

Grandprés would not trust their daughter to us!

[*A pause*]

LUCIENNE. Don't you miss Paris at all?

JEAN. Not at all! Do you?

LUCIENNE. [*Without conviction*] No. Perhaps — I should like to receive a little more company here — only — [*with a smile*] you are so jealous!

JEAN. That's true — but that is because I love you! so much! so much!

LUCIENNE. Yes.

[*A servant enters from the rear*]

THE SERVANT. There are two bicyclists outside and a lady in a carriage who want to see you.

LUCIENNE. Didn't they tell you their names?

THE SERVANT. I forgot to ask them.

JEAN. [*Disappointed, rising*] It's Paul de Maucour and his wife, and Madame de Cattenières, I'll wager! I've a good mind to have the maid tell them that we are not at home.

LUCIENNE. Oh, why?

JEAN. Paul irritates me with his —

LUCIENNE. Some more jealousy!

JEAN. You are right, I am a fool! Then you'd like to see them?

LUCIENNE. Heavens, yes — and besides — perhaps it isn't they at all.

JEAN. I'm quite sure it is. [*To the servant*]

Did you notice whether there was a lady on one of the bicycles?

THE SERVANT. I think so, but I am not quite certain.

JEAN. I'll go see.

[*He goes out with the servant. Lucienne remains a moment alone; she stands there dreaming. Jean, the de Maucours, and Mme. de Cattenières enter. Paul and his wife come in with their bicycles, and are in riding costume. Mme. de Cattenières wears a summer gown.*]

LUCIENNE. It is you! Oh, what a nice surprise.

ALICE. How are you?

[*Jean takes her bicycle and leans it against the wall*]

LUCIENNE. And you? [*They embrace*] You come from Dieppe?

ALICE. Yes.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. It was I who persuaded them to come. They were escorting me in the English buggy. It is charming. [*To Jean*] You have a superb view!

PAUL. That is just what I was saying to him.

JEAN. You are not going away immediately, are you?

PAUL. No.

JEAN. Then let me take your bicycle for you.

PAUL. Slow now — slow now. Not in the sun.

JEAN. Here, I've put it in the shade.

LUCIENNE. [*To Paul.*] We have often thought of you. I said to myself: "Won't they come?"

ALICE. [*From the other side of the stage*] I could not make Paul decide to come.

PAUL. [*Softly to Lucienne*] Do not listen to her; we almost had to drag her here by force. — [*To Jean*] I saw a buggy all harnessed in front of your gate. You were going out?

JEAN. Yes — to see one of my tenants — just a little way from here.

PAUL. He has tenants!

JEAN. Would you like to come with me?

PAUL. On my wheel? Are the roads pretty?

JEAN. Superb — and I have a pacer who'll leave you way behind on the road.

PAUL. Leave me behind on the road! We'll see about that!

JEAN. Come — we'll be back by luncheon time.

LUCIENNE. That's right. Go on. The three of us will chat while you are gone.

PAUL. Let's go!

[*He takes his bicycle, and goes out with Jean*]

LUCIENNE. I am really so glad to see you again!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. You are pleasantly situated here — a beautiful view.

LUCIENNE. Yes, don't you think so? When it's clear we can see the ocean, there, beyond Saint-Martin's steeple.

ALICE. Really?

LUCIENNE. And all the land up to the woods belongs to us and connects with the park.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. That ought to bring in a lot.

LUCIENNE. Last year everything suffered a great deal on account of the droughts.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Why don't they water the land — as they do the boulevards?

LUCIENNE. You're fooling. But let's sit down. [*They sit around the table*] Tell me about Paris. Is there anything new?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Not a thing has happened since Dr. La Belleuse's affair.

LUCIENNE. What was that?

MME DE CATTENIÈRES. What was what?

LUCIENNE. Why, what you were just talking about.

ALICE. You don't know?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Of course Lucienne knows.

LUCIENNE. But I really do not.

ALICE. She doesn't know!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. It's not possible!

LUCIENNE. On my oath!

ALICE. With Madame Longuyon.

LUCIENNE. I know nothing about it.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Well, my dear, at Paris and Dieppe you'd be looked upon as some sort of a phenomenon.

LUCIENNE. But tell me about it.

ALICE. You know that La Belleuse was Madame Longuyon's physician and friend.

LUCIENNE. Yes.

ALICE. Well, La Belleuse, jealous, forbade Monsieur Longuyon —

LUCIENNE. Oh!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Exactly.

LUCIENNE. And Longuyon?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. He did as he was told.

LUCIENNE. [*Laughing*] Lord, that is really funny.

ALICE. But wait, wait! [*To Mme. de Cattenières*] You, my dear, you can tell the rest better than I can.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. One fine day, Madame Longuyon —

LUCIENNE. The situation is extremely interesting — for this dear friend —

[*Alice and Mme. de Cattenières burst out laughing*]

ALICE. [*Rising*] Exquisite! Adorable!

LUCIENNE. What do you mean?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. You do not know how truly you speak.

LUCIENNE. Really?

ALICE. Isn't it delightful to live in a city where such things happen?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. One can well say that there is just one Paris!

ALICE. But didn't you really know about it?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Tell us the truth.

LUCIENNE. I knew nothing about it.

ALICE. But how do you exist, my dear, how do you exist?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. You see a lot of people?

LUCIENNE. No one. The poor country squires around here are very straight laced.

ALICE. But what do you do during the whole blessed day?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Lucienne spends it with her husband.

LUCIENNE. No. Jean attends to his affairs.

ALICE. And you don't get bored?

LUCIENNE. No.

ALICE. Do you realise that you are an absolute heroine?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. When are you coming to the city?

LUCIENNE. We may go to Paris tomorrow or the day after — just for two days. My uncle is expecting his nomination as commander any time now, and he will invite his colleagues who intend giving him his insignia. There will probably be dancing. Dr. La Belleuse has remained in Paris to arrange everything.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. That is the kind of thing he can do. I was asking when you were returning for good.

LUCIENNE. We do not intend to at all.

ALICE. You are going to spend the winter here?

LUCIENNE. Why not?

ALICE. Well, my dear, I should not like to be in your place. You might as well bury yourself immediately.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. [*Looking about*] It's evidently very nice here, but a gilded cage is a cage nevertheless.

ALICE. And you do not complain?

LUCIENNE. I am very happy.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Very happy! You'll be back in Paris within three months, whether your husband wants to or not.

LUCIENNE. Why do you think that I cannot remain here?

Mme. de Cattenières. Because — because, pretty as you are, with the worldly tastes that you have, it would be impossible for you to waste your youth out here in the country.

Lucienne. But if I like it very much?

Alice. [*Rising*] Oh, come now. You can never convince me that this sort of life would satisfy you indefinitely — you above all.

Lucienne. [*Dreaming*] I, above all!

Mme. de Cattenières. You are no more suited for this kind of life than I would be for a tavern waitress. Dr. Bertry was right.

Lucienne. [*Still dreaming*] Yes.

Alice. I never would have believed that you would have stayed here for six months in succession.

Lucienne. Heavens, you know there *are* days when I'd give a lot to be able to see the omnibuses of La Madeleine or the pastry-shops of the Rue Royal.

Mme. de Cattenières. Of course! But what sort of an odor do I smell?

Alice. I don't smell anything.

Mme. de Cattenières. But surely! [*Pointing to Jean's dish*] Is that it? Oh, horrors!

Alice. Why yes — you are right.

Mme. de Cattenières. Why, it's almost poisonous!

Alice. The garlic!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. I was just saying to myself: "But where can that odor be coming from?"

LUCIENNE. [*Very much confused, stands without moving*] Jean has just eaten here.

ALICE. Do you mean to say that he eats *that?* And what was there inside?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Soup —

ALICE. Is that so, Lucienne?

LUCIENNE. Rosalie! Rosalie!

ROSALIE. Yes, madame?

LUCIENNE. Can you never learn to be tidy! I told you before to clear the table.

ROSALIE. But no, madame.

LUCIENNE. Don't talk now, but take the things away.

[*Rosalie clears the table*]

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Ha! that Jean! And I knew him as such a poetic, delicate, ethereal person!

LUCIENNE. He has got it into his head that he wants to eat as the farmers do. I have told him a thousand times that I think it is absolutely ridiculous.

ALICE. You must let him do it — so long as he does not ask you to share it with him.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. When one is in love —

LUCIENNE. [*Laughing a forced laugh*] Ah!

Ah! one does not have to go as far as that. Shall we go in?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. I was just going to ask the same question.

LUCIENNE. Come in, and I'll show you your rooms.

[*They go up the steps; Lucienne is in the rear. Once her friends are inside she sighs deeply and follows them*]

ROSALIE. She never told me to clear the table.

THE DOCTOR. [*Enters*] Rosalie! Has Madame Belmont gone out?

ROSALIE. No, monsieur!

[*The doctor goes into the house. Guernoche enters.*]

GUERNOCHE. Here I am, just the same. But I'm positively anxious — that gentleman who came in before me, who was he? Was it the doctor?

ROSALIE. Yes. Come quickly and see Justin.

GUERNOCHE. Anxious as I am, I'd rather not.

ROSALIE. The doctor is not as bad as that. And besides I have money —

GUERNOCHE. Yes! I feel weak — absolutely weak.

ROSALIE. I know what'll fix you! Come

in. Just the same — when I think that you're nothing but a shepherd —

GUERNOCHE. Yes, and?

ROSALIE. And that you are cleverer than a doctor who has been studying more than twenty years.

GUERNOCHE. Cleverer — cleverer — no — but just as clever, positively.

[*She makes him enter at the right. Dr. Bertry appears on the steps with some medical magazines in his hand*]

THE DOCTOR. Rosalie?

ROSALIE. Monsieur?

THE DOCTOR. Madame has company?

ROSALIE. Yes, monsieur.

THE DOCTOR. Couldn't you have told me? You know very well that I do not like to be with all those gossips. Didn't a telegram come?

ROSALIE. No, monsieur.

THE DOCTOR. You are quite sure?

ROSALIE. Yes, monsieur.

THE DOCTOR. Who was that man who just went in?

ROSALIE. He is — you saw him, monsieur?

THE DOCTOR. Who is it?

ROSALIE. It was the gardener.

THE DOCTOR. What do you mean? I just met the gardener at the gate.

Rosalie. Well! It is père Guernoche.

The Doctor. Père Guernoche?

Rosalie. The physician, not the shepherd.

The Doctor. What physician? What shepherd?

Rosalie. I'll tell you everything, monsieur, because I see that there is no other way — Justin —

The Doctor. Is dead?

Rosalie. No, monsieur, he is cured.

The Doctor. What do you know about it?

Rosalie. He is here.

The Doctor. Justin is here!

Rosalie. Yes, monsieur.

The Doctor. I forbade you to bring him, didn't I?

Rosalie. But he wanted to come so badly.

The Doctor. And he stood the trip?

Rosalie. We took an assistant, and I also had a pillow along.

The Doctor. What a foolish thing you did! He might have died twenty times during the trip.

Rosalie. But he didn't die at all.

The Doctor. That makes no difference. When I told you that he should not make the trip you should have left him in Paris.

Rosalie. But — since he is cured.

The Doctor. Who treated him?

ROSALIE. Père Guernoche.

THE DOCTOR. The shepherd?

ROSALIE. Yes, monsieur.

THE DOCTOR. [*Furious*] It's discouraging to have anything to do with such stupid people! That's a fine thing! the best doctors in Paris tell you that your husband is lost, and you put him in the hands of a charlatan, an ignorant and stupid sorcerer.

ROSALIE. I know very well that père Guernoche is not as clever as those other doctors.

THE DOCTOR. Then why did you entrust Justin's life to him? You do not seem to understand that we have studied, while your père Guernoche can hardly read or write.

ROSALIE. He can't read at all.

THE DOCTOR. There, you see!

ROSALIE. But he cured Justin just the same.

THE DOCTOR. I'll have to see him to believe it.

ROSALIE. If you will come in, monsieur.

THE DOCTOR. To find myself face to face with doctor Guer — with père Guernoche — Never!

ROSALIE. But you see he really did cure my husband! Justin eats and drinks now like every one else, and he is beginning to get up.

THE DOCTOR. And how did he cure him, this père Guernoche?

ROSALIE. I'll tell you how it was, monsieur. By giving him some of his elixir and electricity — because the maladies, he says —

THE DOCTOR. [*Bursts out laughing*] That's enough — I'll believe all when I see Justin.

[*At this moment Justin appears, opening the door for père Guernoche*]

ROSALIE. Here you are, monsieur; here is my husband — with père Guernoche. You can see that he is cured.

[*Justin immediately goes into the house again*]

THE DOCTOR. By Jove, it's true — [*To père Guernoche*] Come over here, you!

GUERNOCHE. Excuse me, I'm in a great hurry, if you'll excuse me, doctor.

THE DOCTOR. Oh, come now! I asked you to come here. Leave us, Rosalie. [*To Guernoche*] Well, my dear colleague!

GUERNOCHE. What's that you're calling me, monsieur?

THE DOCTOR. Do you know what your trade will lead you to?

GUERNOCHE. The trade of being a shepherd — that doesn't bring me in enough to pay my rent — positively.

THE DOCTOR. I'm not speaking of that, I'm speaking of the other thing.

GUERNOCHE. Oh, you want to know when I'm going to build my barn?

THE DOCTOR. Now stop your fooling. You cure sick people, my gay fellow, don't you?

GUERNOCHE. I don't cure 'em, they cure themselves.

THE DOCTOR. What do you do to your patients?

GUERNOCHE. Practically nothing. They must want to be cured, and once they think about it, it's all done.

THE DOCTOR. [*Aside*] He has more sense than he thinks. So you only cure nervous complaints?

GUERNOCHE. I take charge of no one, no one, positively.

THE DOCTOR. Don't finesse, now. You are making fun of me with that foolish air you put on.

GUERNOCHE. I! My Lord! my Lord! You tell me that at my age — at seventy years and three months!

THE DOCTOR. It may cost you very dear in the end.

GUERNOCHE. Very dear?

THE DOCTOR. Yes. A fine and jail, — you know it very well.

GUERNOCHE. Not at all. Ah! You mean to say that I practice medicine?

THE DOCTOR. Of course!

GUERNOCHE. You are wrong. The physi-

cian gives medicines — I give nothing — I look at them and they are cured. Is it forbidden to look at people?

THE DOCTOR. No.

GUERNOCHE. Well then?

THE DOCTOR. Who gave you the idea of looking at them in order to cure them, as you put it?

GUERNOCHE. Well, it's this way. I was a shepherd and cared for Monsieur de Grandpré's sheep. He lives over there, in back of the Laurents, whose father was mayor of Ébreville. You know, on the road up to Hautmont?

THE DOCTOR. Go on, go on.

GUERNOCHE. They used to accuse me of sorcery, and so on and so forth — because I'm not talkative, on account of my being alone from morning till night up there on the hills with my sheep — and that doesn't make a person very talkative —

THE DOCTOR. Yes, yes.

GUERNOCHE. One day, when I was coming back to the house I saw Baffieu's daughter on the road. She was writhing and howling as if she were possessed of the devil. I looked at her, she looked at me, and she got scared. I cried as loud as I could: "Be quiet!" and she was cured. After that when there were other sick people they were always brought to me.

Not wanting to get into a spat with them I did what I could to cure 'em, and they were all cured, positively. I did like this to 'em — [*He makes a few passes with his hands*] — without knowing — just to do something. And one day when I was at Rouen I saw a magician, and then I understood that I cured by electricity. There you are!

THE DOCTOR. And not one of your patients has ever died?

GUERNOCHE. Not one, provided that I didn't give 'em any medicine —

THE DOCTOR. And why are they cured?

GUERNOCHE. Well, you know — I've thought it all over with my sheep out in the fields — and I've decided that it's electricity, my electricity, — because, you see, there are two kinds of maladies: when one's humors and one's blood get mixed, and when one's blood turns into water; you know that as well as I do, don't you? You've seen how foolish people are when they're sick.

THE DOCTOR. Of course!

GUERNOCHE. And it's only us that knows it, positively.

THE DOCTOR. Enough now! Leave me alone. Go now. And don't let me find you here again!

GUERNOCHE. I'll do what I can, doctor!

[*He moves away*]

THE DOCTOR. [*Aside*] Suggestion. The zouave Jacob. [*To Guernoche*] Tell me, have you ever cured people who have wounds, tumors?

GUERNOCHE. I've never seen any.

THE DOCTOR. And if a person thus afflicted came to you?

GUERNOCHE. If one came? [*He reflects deeply, looking at the doctor*] If one of 'em came, I'd send him to you, doctor, positively.

[*He leaves*]

LUCIENNE. [*Coming down the steps*] How do you do, uncle?

THE DOCTOR. Have you a telegram for me?

LUCIENNE. No!

THE DOCTOR. That's queer! My nomination must have appeared in the official list!

LUCIENNE. Do you know that Madame de Cattenières is here?

THE DOCTOR. Yes.

LUCIENNE. She entreats you to come and see her.

THE DOCTOR. A consultation in the country. Will she never leave me in peace?

LUCIENNE. Oh, come now, you cannot avoid her — now go to her with good grace.

THE DOCTOR. She ought to see père Guernoche.

LUCIENNE. Don't say that; he could cure her.

THE DOCTOR. Ah! — so you too, you too believe in père Guernoche?

LUCIENNE. Why of course — he cured Justin —

THE DOCTOR. [*Furious*] He cured Justin! He cured Justin! They'll deafen me with that cry! He cured Justin! Do you know why he cured Justin? Because Justin was not ill!

LUCIENNE. But you had given him up.

THE DOCTOR. Possibly, but he was not ill. He had an idea that he was ill, and he thought of it so much that he would have died from it. But there was nothing the matter with him. If there had been anything the matter with Justin you can be very sure that your père Guernoche could never have cured him. It is purely suggestion. Justin got the idea into his head that he was ill, Guernoche made him believe that he was cured, and that's the way père Guernoche cured him. And I do not want to hear any more about it, do you understand! Why, it doesn't hold water! [*He puts his hand to his heart*] I see I am wrong to work myself into a fury. [*He sits down*]

LUCIENNE. I wanted to ask your advice about something — about my health — I feel nervous — crushed — sad without any reason.

THE DOCTOR. Make Jean take you back to Paris.

LUCIENNE. He wants me to remain here.

THE DOCTOR. He is wrong.

LUCIENNE. Don't you think that with a little will power I could overcome my malady — which is, above all, a moral malady?

THE DOCTOR. Will power! — So you are another who thinks that we have a little spring in us that we can press on at will, and which allows us to modify ourselves? No, no. We have no power over ourselves. We are nothing but results and, when we think that we are acting from our inner impulse we are only giving way to a stronger impulse than all others. Return to Paris and you will feel better. [*He rises and walks up the steps. He stops, out of breath*] I cannot go up more than four steps at a time now without stopping! [*He sighs deeply and enters the house*]

LUCIENNE. "We are nothing but results!" Oh, I am so bored!

[*A moment later Paul enters from the rear*]

PAUL. [*Coming up to Lucienne*] How do you do!

LUCIENNE. Ah! You frightened me! You're back already!

PAUL. Yes.

LUCIENNE. Alone? You could not keep up?

PAUL. Keep up? Why, I would have beaten Jean if a part of my bicycle hadn't broken.

LUCIENNE. You have my deepest sympathy.

PAUL. You are too good. But what are you thinking of? You are not very gay!

LUCIENNE. You are mistaken. I was here alone.

PAUL. All alone?

LUCIENNE. All alone! [*A pause*]

PAUL. You say that you pity me, Lucienne; but I think it's rather you who needs the pity.

LUCIENNE. I?

PAUL. Yes.

LUCIENNE. Why?

PAUL. Because you are not happy.

LUCIENNE. But —

PAUL. I know it.

LUCIENNE. I love Jean — he loves me.

PAUL. Yes, he loves you — but not enough. He spends more time with his farmers than with you. Ah, Lucienne! we two would have been so happy!

LUCIENNE. [*Troubled*] We two?

PAUL. Yes, Alice is not the sort of a wife that I should have. Ah, if it could only be done all over again! And to think that I loved you so!

LUCIENNE. No, Paul, you never loved me!

PAUL. Oh yes, I swear that I loved you! It is you who never loved me!

LUCIENNE. [*Forgetting herself*] I?

PAUL. [*Approaching her*] Lucienne!

LUCIENNE. [*Collecting herself*] Come, my friend, let us not talk of the past. All that is over and nothing can be done now. Besides, you are mistaken. I am very happy with Jean — because I have enough sense to understand that Jean has other things to do than to lie at my feet and sigh deeply all day long. Let's not think of that any longer. Let us be friends, good friends, if you wish — and speak of something else — of bicycling.

PAUL. No! I want to tell you —

LUCIENNE. If you do not care to speak about bicycling I shall go.

PAUL. Very well. Ask me questions.

LUCIENNE. Good! Do you find riding amusing?

PAUL. Yes. One has the sensation of speed, of a speed without fear, and one which can be controlled. The wind blows into one's face: one drinks in the air, becomes intoxicated. And it is so delicious. [*Going to Alice's bicycle, he bends down*] See, here is where my bicycle is broken.

LUCIENNE. [*Who has followed him*] Is it hard to sit on?

PAUL. Not at all. Would you like to try?

LUCIENNE. I so want to learn.

PAUL. Try it.

LUCIENNE. No — I'd fall.

PAUL. You'll not fall — I'll hold you on.

LUCIENNE. If you should let go.

PAUL. But I won't.

LUCIENNE. Oh, but besides, I'd have to have a costume like Alice's.

PAUL. That is not at all necessary — this is a lady's wheel. [*He moves the pedals into position*] Put your foot there. No, not that one — the left one. Don't be afraid. I am holding you. There we are! [*He is in front of the bicycle*]

LUCIENNE. Oh, it's fine — but don't let me go!

PAUL. You need not worry. [*A pause*]

LUCIENNE. [*Laughing*] I'm afraid I'm going to fall.

PAUL. Don't be frightened, I tell you. [*A pause*]

LUCIENNE. [*With a cry*] Ah, I'm falling, I'm falling! [*To save herself from falling she instinctively puts her arm around Paul's neck.*] I beg your pardon — I felt myself going. I'm heavy, am I not?

PAUL. [*His voice changed*] No. It's because you are frightened. Try it again.

LUCIENNE. No. I want to get off.

PAUL. Why? You are all right. [*A pause*]

LUCIENNE. [*To Paul, who has his arm about her waist*) You are holding me too tight. I want to get off. Paul, let me get off, I want to.

PAUL. [*Softly*] I love you, Lucienne.

LUCIENNE. [*Troubled*] Ah, Paul, that is bad, that is bad.

[*She glides off into his arms*]

PAUL. I love you, I love you!

LUCIENNE. [*Defending herself feebly*] Let me go, Paul, let me go!

PAUL. I love you!

[*Lucienne is in a sort of swoon. Paul embraces her*]

LUCIENNE. Oh, this is wrong — this is very wrong — [*She frees herself and stops Paul with a gesture*] I beg you —

PAUL. Lucienne!

(*They are a few paces apart, still ill at ease, when Jean enters*]

LUCIENNE. [*Aside*] My God, what have I done! what have I done! Well, he was right!

JEAN. [*Happily*] Ha, ha, Mr. bicyclist! You who were going to beat my horse. — [*To Lucienne, laughing*] Did he tell you what happened? — Make fun of him a little, Lucienne.

LUCIENNE. Really, Monsieur de Maucour. —

[*She tries to laugh and stops, not knowing what to say. But Jean does not notice it*]

JEAN. [*To Paul*] It's too bad that you didn't come with me to see père Ségard —

[*While talking he looks from Lucienne to Paul. He notices that they are ill at ease. Gradually he becomes jealous and his gayety leaves him. A pause. He is waiting for a laugh that does not come*]

JEAN. "The roof will be falling on the heads of my children." But do you know which roof was damaged?

LUCIENNE. [*Who has not been listening to him*] No. Which one?

JEAN. [*Very seriously*] The stable.

LUCIENNE. [*Forcing a laugh*] That's very funny.

JEAN. Isn't it? [*To Lucienne*] Doesn't that make you laugh?

LUCIENNE. Why yes.

JEAN. After all — I see that you are not interested. [*To Paul*] Have you been here long?

PAUL. Yes. Your wife and I have been chatting, and now I see that I have hardly enough time to change for luncheon. Will you excuse me?

[*He goes out. Jean becomes again as he was in the first act*]

JEAN. [*After a pause*] What were you talking about — you — and Paul?

LUCIENNE. Oh, nothing — of one thing and another.

JEAN. You have already forgotten?

LUCIENNE. No. But it was of so little importance.

JEAN. Tell me just the same.

LUCIENNE. We were speaking — of his wife — of Alice.

JEAN. And what else?

LUCIENNE. And — that was all!

JEAN. [*Looking at her*] Truly?

LUCIENNE. Why, you are putting me through a cross examination!

JEAN. Yes — yes, Lucienne — [*A pause*] Oh, come! I am not blind! I noticed that you were both ill at ease. And why?

LUCIENNE. Ill at ease?

JEAN. Be frank, Lucienne. Tell me the truth. I want to know it — I ask your pardon for having spoken as I did. It was simply the old complaint. The sadness that I thought I had cured — and which does not exist. Above all, do not lie to me — above all, do not lie. He paid you some compliments. Answer me.

LUCIENNE. Yes.

JEAN. You doubtless spoke of the past?

LUCIENNE. Yes.

JEAN. And after that? — [*A pause*] Perhaps he took you in his arms, and, in spite of you, kissed you. [*Lucienne nods. Jean becomes excited*] And you did not cry out? And you did not send him away?

LUCIENNE. Pardon me, Jean — pardon me — I lost my head. I did not know where I was. For just a moment I was mad.

JEAN. [*Laughing nervously*] Ah! ah! A moment of madness! That is your excuse, you women! At least have the courage to confess. Confess that you love him!

LUCIENNE. No!

JEAN. You love him, I say! Weren't you to marry him?

LUCIENNE. I do not love him!

JEAN. But why lie about it? Isn't it evident? Didn't I see you two on the very day that I confessed my love for you? Didn't I see you speaking together? Didn't I see you smile when he whispered something in your ear, while he gazed at you tenderly all the while? And your hands! You do not dare to tell me that they have not held his secretly! You do not dare, because I have seen, I have seen! And when he came today didn't you suddenly become happy? Wasn't it you who made me receive him? Answer me! Who knows but what you were even expecting him?

Lucienne. Jean, be careful of what you say! Do not accuse me, do not crush me. Perhaps I was a bit foolish; and I ask your pardon. Grant me this pardon without insisting any more. Help me, Jean, I beg you, help me! I am in the midst of a crisis: I do not know where I am going, I do not know where I shall be tomorrow. You can still save me, you can still save me. Help me!

Jean. You are afraid of yourself! You confess it! You see that you confess it!

Lucienne. Yes, it is true, I am afraid of myself.

Jean. But you do not seem to understand that loving him would be your only excuse! If you did not love him what a woman you would be!

Lucienne. My husband, have pity on me! Have pity on me, Jean!

Jean. Go away! Leave me! All is broken! All is over! Ah! the fond dream — the fond dream that was! I now find myself the unfortunate man I was before I married you. Married you! — I thought, that by the power of my love I could soften you, and make you a faithful and respectable wife; I thought that I could lift your heart high above these worldly flirtations, and you set yourself to this task with me! But instead of our purpose being ac-

complished, if luck had not led me to discover your intrigue in the beginning, you would have lived this lie, and would have given me your kisses, and he would have given me his hand. You would have deceived me in a cowardly way! And when you were satiated with caresses you two would have laughed at me!

LUCIENNE. [*Crying out*] Enough, Jean! enough! it is false! it is false! I love you! pity me! I love you!

JEAN. Ah, yes, you would have laughed! You would not have been the only ones, and I know very well what they would have said.

LUCIENNE. [*Taking his hands*] What?

JEAN. That they were expecting it!

LUCIENNE. [*Stifling a cry*] Ah! — [*In a cold voice*] Now all is over! You have pronounced the irreparable word, and you have killed our love!

JEAN. No, Lucienne, no, my wife! No! Forget, forget what I just said! I ask your pardon! You know you should forgive me — you know what an unhappy man I am, and how I have suffered my whole life! You ought to have pity for all my misery, Lucienne, and forget, and forgive; I have always loved you and I make you suffer. My darling, I made you suffer; forgive me! forgive me!

[*He sobs and sits down at the table*]

Lucienne. [*Impassively*] I have nothing to forgive. You made clear the truth that I did not want to see. You were right, we were deceived, and I was wrong in thinking that I could love you. Ah! but I wanted to so badly, I wanted to with all the power I possessed; but I am not free, I am not free! I wanted to escape from myself, and I fell back heavily, and I am broken — I have been bored for quite some time now; I yearned for Paris, for the balls, the people; and I hoped that this ennui was only passing, but now I clearly see that it is my nature that is revolting, and just one unexpected contact was enough to make me defenceless against Paul, whom I no longer love. And it is not my fault, it is fatal! It is stronger than I, it is stronger than I! Yes, let us weep, Jean, let us weep! We are very unfortunate, very unfortunate!

[*They both weep*]

Jean. It is my fault, Lucienne! I should not have married you, since I could not love you as you wanted to be loved. But it is not my fault either.

Lucienne. They told us, Jean! There are prisons from which there is no escape! — [*Changing her voice*] Well, since it is inevitable, since it was definite even before my birth, it is

useless to struggle any longer! — and I too am going to be happy!

[*Dr. Bertry appears on the steps with a telegram in his hand*]

THE DOCTOR. Jean! Lucienne! I have the telegram! My nomination!

LUCIENNE. Ah yes! You have triumphed! You have triumphed! — completely!

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

[*A drawing room in Dr.Bertry's house in Paris. Jean is talking to Dr. Richon*]

JEAN. La Belleuse stayed here to prepare for this celebration. As soon as Dr. Bertry received the telegram telling him of his nomination, he left for Paris and asked Lucienne and me to accompany him. [*La Belleuse has come in at the left. He mops his brow like a man who has just done some hard work, and finally sits down. He is wearing the Legion of Honor*]

RICHON. [*Softly to Jean*] Here is Dr. La Belleuse.

LA BELLEUSE. [*Who has sunk into a large armchair*] Ouf! — Good evening, gentlemen. I can do no more, I can do no more. You cannot imagine how much trouble I had to get up this spontaneous manifestation of which Dr. Bertry is at this moment the object!

[*A short pause. Suddenly he trembles, rises, touches an electric bell. As no one appears immediately he rushes to the door at the left. The servant enters just at this time*]

LA BELLEUSE. Where are the guests?

THE SERVANT. The gentlemen are in the small salon.

La Belleuse. For the giving out of the insignia. Good. And the musicians?

The Servant. They are here.

La Belleuse. Good! We'll have to remember to give them refreshments — and to tell the steward. Never mind, I'll do it myself. [*The servant goes out*] I beg your pardon. I can do no more. This affair, this ball, organised in forty-eight hours — I can say it without false modesty — it is a *tour de force.* Provided that all goes well! And there are so many people! [*Going to the right*] At first this affair was to be very select — just a few colleagues and intimate friends. But the master is so popular! All Paris wanted to be invited. The favored ones are going to have a surprise: Dr. Bertry is going to read fragments of his next communication to the Academy, on the sovereignty of science. [*Pointing carelessly to his button*] You see I was included in the promotion — Dr. Bertry surprised me. I really do not prize it much. But it is for my patients. It is sure to have some effect on them.

Richon and Jean. Congratulations!

La Belleuse. Let's not speak of it. I only mentioned it because you were looking at it. This demonstration for Dr. Bertry is fine, isn't it?

THE SERVANT. [*Entering*] Dr. La Belleuse?

LA BELLEUSE. I'm coming. You see, I haven't a moment to myself! [*He goes*]

RICHON. Let us go on with the conversation which that fool interrupted. My poor Jean! You were saying?

JEAN. Lucienne followed her uncle here. I intended remaining in Ébreville, but I could not.

RICHON. You know Paul de Maucour is invited.

JEAN. What difference does that make! He is not responsible for what happens; it is simply our destiny!

RICHON. And Dr. Bertry?

JEAN. He? He bother about us! He does not understand the seriousness of what has happened. He thinks it is simply a lover's quarrel. Besides, I did not want to insist, for fear of hearing him say: "I told you so!" which I guessed was on the tip of his tongue.

RICHON. Haven't you tried to explain things to your wife?

JEAN. Yes. But she did not want to listen to me. I have just seen her. She is gay, very gay. Do you understand? She is gay!

RICHON. Her mother's hereditary influence has been so impressed upon her mind that she has ended by believing it. She is convinced

that she cannot be a virtuous woman, and the poor girl is trying to imitate her friends, Madame de Cattenières and Alice Longuyon.

[*Lucienne is heard laughing outside*]

JEAN. Listen to that! Listen to that laughter!

[*Lucienne and Mme. de Cattenières go across the stage*]

LUCIENNE. [*In passing*] And so it was La Belleuse who reconciled them.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. La Belleuse himself.

LUCIENNE. That is delicious.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. My husband positively wanted to give him a gift to prove his gratitude.

[*They laugh again, and go out*]

JEAN. [*Weeping, rises*] My poor Lucienne! my poor Lucienne! She appears to me to be dead.

RICHON. Do not weep! Have courage! This gayety cannot last.

[*Fresh bursts of laughter are heard from Lucienne and Mme. de Cattenières. La Belleuse enters with Morienval. Jean walks to the door through which Lucienne has passed. He remains there a moment, following her with his eyes, then he goes out*]

LA BELLEUSE. Wonderful, this demonstra-

tion, wonderful! You missed a lot, my dear friend; didn't he, Morienval?

MORIENVAL. I should say so.

LA BELLEUSE. Astonishing — prodigious.

BERTRY. [*Enters; to Richon*] I am glad to see you, my dear doctor. I wanted to ask these gentlemen something, and I am glad that you too can give me your advice. Listen, gentlemen, all three of you are physicians; now answer me frankly: is it possible for a shepherd, a village quack, a charlatan — call him what you will — would it be possible for him to cure patients whom physicians have given up as hopeless.

MORIENVAL. Never!

RICHON. Who knows?

BERTRY. You have not given me your answer, La Belleuse?

LA BELLEUSE. No.

BERTRY. Because?

LA BELLEUSE. Because there is no answer to such a question. If an imbecile could succeed where physicians do not, I ask you what good are all our studies and degrees?

BERTRY. Then you think it is possible?

LA BELLEUSE. No.

MORIENVAL. No.

BERTRY. Well, it is possible just the same.

There is in Ébreville a shepherd by the name of Guernoche.

La Belleuse. Who cured Justin — yes, I know all about it.

Bertry. Well?

La Belleuse. Dr. Bertry explained it to me: there was nothing the matter with Justin.

Morienval. There was nothing the matter with him.

Bertry. And Brinvillard. Do you know Brinvillard?

La Belleuse. Yes.

Bertry. Was there anything the matter with him?

Richon. Of course.

La Belleuse. I know him. And your père Guernoche will not cure him, I assure you.

Bertry. It seems that he has cured him, just the same.

La Belleuse. [*Bursts out laughing*] Oh, I beg you — do not get angry — don't be offended — but it is so funny. He cured Brinvillard!

Morienval. [*At the same time*] He cured Brinvillard!

La Belleuse. [*Laughs again, then becomes serious*] Do you know who took care of Brinvillard? [*A pause*] It was Dr. Bertry. [*Triumphantly*] Ah!

Bertry. Very well. But Brinvillard could

not stand on his feet. And yesterday he was seen hunting. What do you say to that?

La Belleuse. I say — I say that if I saw him myself I would not believe it. You must understand, my dear friend, that there are laws of nature; laws, do you understand? Laws that cannot be transgressed!

Morienval. What would be the use of having any if they could be transgressed?

La Belleuse. [*To Richon*] What do you think of it, my dear colleague? Of course, excepting Monsieur Bertry, who is perfectly sincere; but the others — those patients who have lost confidence in the knowledge of the best physicians — and who go and put themselves in the hands of a shepherd — doesn't a silly thing like that revolt you?

Richon. No.

La Belleuse. No!

Richon. [*Kindly*] No. Just think how much those poor people must suffer in order to go and beg a shepherd to give them a few words of hope! You call it foolishness? — perhaps — but it is done on account of pain, weakness, misery. And besides, we must find out, we do not know everything, you know.

Bertry. You, Richon, you admit that a shepherd might have cured this man?

Richon. Heavens, why not?

La Belleuse. You say that! You have no faith then in our profession?

Richon. I haven't much faith in medicine, that is true, and I'll tell you why I haven't — I could not save my only son from death when he was seventeen, sir, and — I swear —

[*Dr. Bertry enters. He is radiant. He wears the order of the commander around his neck*]

The Doctor. Well, now — what are all of you plotting there? You are right to isolate yourselves. There is such a crowd in the salon! I say crowd — and I am wrong. Am I not wrong? Tell me gentlemen, haven't I cause to be confused? In diamonds — they have given me the orders set in diamonds! I really do not know where the pessimists live who deny fraternity and loyalty. It is really too beautiful, and my modest merits do not — I am all confused. And you can believe me, if you will — of course, my nomination gives me a great deal of pleasure, I will not try to hide that; but what has moved me most of all has been the spontaneous manifestation of sympathy with which I have been — have been honored. Telegrams are coming from every corner of France. How many have we received since noon, La Belleuse?

La Belleuse. Forty-two!

The Doctor. Forty-two! His pocket is

full of them — isn't it, La Belleuse? — Show them to the gentlemen — just for curiosity.

[*La Belleuse takes a package of telegrams out of his pocket*] Look at these! [*To La Belleuse*] And what did you say the *concierge* told the butler about the telegraph office?

La Belleuse. He was wagering that they would have to engage extra help.

The Doctor. Extra help! The good people! [*He gives La Belleuse the telegrams*] Here, you keep these! [*He gradually becomes ill at ease during the following*] I assure you that this all is very, very nice — very nice — it is the reward of — it is the reward of forty years of uninterrupted study. I am — I am very very happy. [*He places his hand on his heart and breathes hard*] It is homage — a homage to medicine — [*At the end of his strength*] But leave me, I beg you.

Bertry. What is the matter with you?

The Doctor. [*Pulling himself together*] With me? Nothing. What do you think? There is nothing the matter. I only ask you —

Richon. You are suffering —

La Belleuse. You are ill, dear master —

Morienval. Yes, you are ill —

The Doctor. [*Animated*] Ill — I ill. You are mad; I ill!

BERTRY. Be calm — we all see that you are ill.

THE DOCTOR. You make me tired! I forbid you to say that, do you understand me? I ill! I am less ill than you are — yes, than you. Only you do not know it — I am in better health than you, La Belleuse; you will never live to be my age, I assure you — I do not know what has got into the three of you. [*Reassuming his composed air with a great effort, and picking his words*] I was telling you that the manifestation with which I have been honored is a homage to the whole medical world, a homage to science. And as the excitement had tired me a bit I asked you to leave me. But do not say that I am ill or suffering. I am neither suffering nor ill, do you hear? There now. [*With a smile*] Leave me. La Belleuse — see who is there.

LA BELLEUSE. Yes, dear master. [*To Richon, as he goes out*] Now *I* shall have to receive congratulations, and it is so tiresome.

BERTRY. Is it over?

THE DOCTOR. Quite.

BERTRY. Listen. I have something to say to you. You promise not to get angry? You know Brinvillard —

THE DOCTOR. Yes.

BERTRY. He is cured.

THE DOCTOR. [*Looking at him*] By père Guernoche?

BERTRY. Yes.

THE DOCTOR. Well?

BERTRY. Well. You promise not to get angry?

THE DOCTOR. I trust you are not going to ask me to be treated by your village quack.

BERTRY. Put yourself in my place. Some one who was suffering from the same malady that you were is cured. I do not bother about who the healer was, whether he has degrees or not. I am telling you this because I love you and I do not want you to suffer. You can at least do that for me, your brother.

THE DOCTOR. Once for all, leave me alone. — You are very kind, but leave me alone. [*A pause. Friendly*] Ah, I recognize you only too well, you false sceptic! You are all alike. You do not believe in our science, but you believe in père Guernoche's secrets! You do not dare to say now that physicians are not indispensable to humanity. [*Serious*] But let us not speak of that any longer. Listen to me. Even if I were certain that your père Guernoche could cure me — you understand: even if I were certain — I would refuse to see him.

BERTRY. That is pure stubborness.

THE DOCTOR. No, it is dignity, professional dignity.

[*La Belleuse enters. He is holding his sides in a fit of laughter*]

LA BELLEUSE. Mr. Bertry — I have a good one. Some news that I have just heard. I was looking for you in order to tell you about it.

BERTRY. Well, tell me.

LA BELLEUSE. I — ha, ha, ha! — Your Brinvillard — cured by père Guernoche. Oh, no — ha, ha, ha! — I cannot. Well, he is dea-a-a-a-a-d!

THE DOCTOR. Ha, ha, ha! —

LA BELLEUSE. [*Still laughing*] In coming back from the hunt — at his house. All of a sudden — psst! — and it was all over. [*He laughs so that the tears stream down his face*]

THE DOCTOR. [*To his brother*] You are not laughing?

BERTRY. You are like two beasts! One would think that you were furious because he escaped you.

THE DOCTOR. [*Who has stopped laughing*] Really. It is nothing to laugh about. [*As if to himself*] He died suddenly —

LA BELLEUSE. I beg your pardon. Only I came to look for you because a new delegation has arrived. I was just informed —

THE DOCTOR. A new delegation?

LA BELLEUSE. Yes, with a discourse —

[*Lucienne, Mme. de Cattenières, and Mme. Longuyon enter in the order named*]

LUCIENNE. Uncle — they are looking for you everywhere. A delegation —

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. My dear doctor, you are hiding yourself.

MME. LONGUYON. They are the physicians from Dieppe.

LUCIENNE. Do you want to have them come in here?

THE DOCTOR. No, no. Come with me, La Belleuse.

[*The ladies are left alone*]

LUCIENNE. This will be a good place to wait until the end of all the speeches, and we can chat here comfortably. I am so glad to be with you both. If you like, we three can be good friends.

MME. LONGUYON. Charmed, I am sure.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. And I too!

LUCIENNE. [*Very nervous*] What were we saying? The poor woman must have gone through terrible anxiety.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Why?

LUCIENNE. Heavens. It seems to me that one ought not to live so. The fear of being surprised, the tales that have to be invented,

the blunders of one's friends who say they have seen you in such and such a place, when you yourself had said that you were somewhere else. It must keep one on pins and needles all the time.

MME. LONGUYON. Bah!

[*She questions Mme. de Cattenières with a movement of her head*]

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Pshaw!

MME. LONGUYON. One gets used to it.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. They say so, at least. [*A pause*]

MME. LONGUYON. They say so. You understand that we know nothing about this ourselves.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Oh, my dear, if La Belleuse heard you now!

MME. LONGUYON. La Belleuse! Anyway, he is really nothing.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. As a physician — but only as a physician. [*To Lucienne*] Isn't it so, dear?

LUCIENNE. Surely. [*To Mme. Longuyon*] But I thought that you were on such good terms with him?

MME. LONGUYON. You must not speak about that! Such things one does not confess.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. That was only to

hide the game he was playing. Husbands suspect men of whom their wives speak ill.

LUCIENNE. [*To Mme. de Cattenières, forcing a laugh*] Ah, ah! And you do not confess either!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. [*Shocked*] What are you thinking of? I have a liaison! I am a widow, my dear!

LUCIENNE. And when your husband was alive?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. [*Dreaming*] Ah, it was nice then! [*With a vague smile*] Poor Raymond!

MME. LONGUYON. He knew nothing?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. I would never have forgiven myself for an awkward move that could have disturbed his happiness and comfort. I esteemed him greatly.

LUCIENNE. And nevertheless —

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. My dear Lucienne, you will understand me later on in life: A woman never does wrong until after her husband knows about it.

MME. LONGUYON. Of course. As long as we know how to hide things we are harming no one.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. [*With lowered eyes*] I might dare to add: on the contrary — but I am talking seriously. A woman's duty to-

ward her husband is to make him happy. My husband was the luckiest of men.

LUCIENNE. [*Laughing*] At cards, too?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. [*Quickly*] Well, no, my dear — It was unbelievable: he lost all the time.

LUCIENNE. And the first intrigue — no emotions, no remorse?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Yes. A great deal. What made that first adventure so delicious. [*Lost in her thoughts*] I remember — [*A pause*]

LUCIENNE. What, tell us.

MME. LONGUYON. Ah, yes, tell us. You remember?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Oh, it was nothing! — a coincidence, a mere detail — insignificant to others — but something which I cannot think of without a sort of delicious sorrow. That first time was on the first anniversary of our marriage.

MME. LONGUYON. The delay was seasonable.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. I know it very well. But just the same — when I returned and found my husband with his gift and a smile upon his face — I felt a little something. He was so confident! If I had known —

LUCIENNE. You would not have — ?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. [*Very serious*] No! I would have waited a little —

LUCIENNE. [*With a forced laugh*] Ha, ha, ha! — that is charming.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. What is the matter with you?

LUCIENNE. Oh, nothing — what else do they say? Tell me some other stories.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. [*Ashamed*] Oh, Lucienne!

LUCIENNE. About your good friends — about their husbands. Has Monsieur de Benchene a mistress? And Paul de Maucour? And Paul de Maucour?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. No, not yet.

MME. LONGUYON. And he is married a whole year already!

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Yes, I do not understand it!

LUCIENNE. Can't you tell me anything else? Ah, I wanted to ask you. Have you seen the new pantomime?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Yes.

LUCIENNE. What is it about?

MME. LONGUYON. Celia will tell you about it. I should never dare. *Au revoir*, my dears; I have this valse with Dr. La Belleuse —

LUCIENNE. Then we'll see you later.

[*Mme. Longuyon goes out*]

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. She would never dare! She makes me laugh.

LUCIENNE. Yes, doesn't she? Well, tell me about it.

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Oh, it cannot be told.

LUCIENNE. Bah! We are *entre nous.*

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Why, you see, they had to make a pantomime out of it. If you go to see it take a black lace fan with you. One can see perfectly through it and one cannot be seen.

LUCIENNE. It has made a big hit, hasn't it?

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. They have had to give matinees — Why, Madame Longuyon took her mother to see it.

LUCIENNE. What was the matter with me just now? You did not take it ill. I see now how ridiculous I must have been.

[*Bertry enters*]

MME. DE CATTENIÈRES. Oh! — my dear! Are you going to dance?

LUCIENNE. Yes.

BERTRY. I'd like to have a word with you, Lucienne.

LUCIENNE. Very well. [*Softly to Mme. de Cattenières, whom she takes to the door*] I wanted to ask you something — [*She hesitates*] Bah! why not? If you should see Paul de Maucour tell him to come here after my father goes. I have something to say to him.

Mme. de Cattenières. Very well, my dear. [*She goes. Lucienne closes the door*]

Bertry. Jean has just told me what has happened between you two. You are going to make up, aren't you, my dear?

Lucienne. [*Nervous*] *He* sent you?

Bertry. Yes. He is sorry for the words that escaped him.

Lucienne. He is giving both himself and you useless trouble.

Bertry. What do you intend to do?

Lucienne. I wish some one would tell me.

Bertry. You make every one around you unhappy, Lucienne.

Lucienne. Whom do I make unhappy? My husband? I warned him before our marriage. He knew what chances he was taking when he married me: he wanted to play the game just the same, and he lost it. All the worse. I suffer as much from it as he does. Is it my uncle? He would laugh at anything that happens, and he is overjoyed at his nomination. Is it you? That is possible, but it is justice.

Bertry. Because?

Lucienne. Because all that has passed is your work.

Bertry. Please explain what you mean.

Lucienne. I cannot. You must understand.

Bertry. I beg you to explain.

LUCIENNE. I should not know how without seeming to be disrespectful.

BERTRY. Have I not always been good to you?

LUCIENNE. Too good.

BERTRY. And you reproach me for that?

LUCIENNE. Yes.

BERTRY. I again repeat that I do not understand you.

LUCIENNE. You realize, don't you, that I deserve some pity? My union with Jean is broken, my happiness is lost. What is to become of me now? No, let me speak! Ordinary, happy life in mediocrity, the happiness of the fireplace, the beloved husband, the babe that one rocks — I am not made for all that. Every one has told me so, and even Jean ended by saying it. I reproach you for having given me an education that made my destiny so repulsive to me. If you had left me where I was born I should not have suffered.

BERTRY. So that is my crime?

LUCIENNE. That is the reason why I suffer, and it is directly due to you. Without this education I should be like so many others, unconscious and happy.

BERTRY. Happy in misery!

LUCIENNE. There cannot be misery where there is no responsibility.

BERTRY. My daughter!

LUCIENNE. Alas! yes! your daughter! You wanted to bring me up to your level! You should have paid no attention to me; then I should not have been Monsieur Bertry's daughter, but simply the daughter of Sophie Claret. Why did you acknowledge me?

BERTRY. [*Without raising his voice*] Lucienne! Why did I acknowledge you! I'll tell you, my child. I loved your mother, who was my companion for four years, very dearly. If I was wrong the only excuse I can give is my youth and my need for affection. I have nothing to tell you about your mother's life before I met her; sad to say, you know about it. When you were born I felt myself bound to her by even closer ties, I felt that a new duty was imposed upon me: to watch over you, and to make your life as sweet as possible in order, if possible, to atone for the illegitimacy of your birth. Then your mother fell sick. You will never know how deeply she loved you. You will never know how many tears she shed on your account.

LUCIENNE. [*A little softened*] Why did she weep on my account?

BERTRY. Because she loved you, and because your future worried her. Her fondest dream was to sacrifice everything to you. Then

she reproached herself for having given you her name in the first transports of maternal love, and she often wept about it. [*Gradually Bertry's voice changes*] When she felt the end coming, she called me to her side and said: "It is best for me to die, for I should have spoiled her later on, anyway."

LUCIENNE. [*Moved*] She said that?

BERTRY. I'll show you a letter that she wrote me about it. It was she who entreated me to acknowledge you. And I did it, Lucienne, for her sake and for yours. [*He is choked with emotion*] The sheet of paper on which you were acknowledged as my daughter I took to her on what was to be her last day. She still had enough strength to read and her face, ravaged by pain and suffering, became calm and beautiful once more, and was lighted up with joy; two tears fell from the corners of her eyes onto the pillow; and she thanked me! She thanked me, Lucienne, and then she passed away. You see how she loved you.

LUCIENNE. [*Softly, her hands clasped*] Mother! [*She weeps silently*]

BERTRY. [*Without looking up to heaven*] Oh, my darling! If she only could hear you! [*A pause*] Tell me in what other way you think I was wrong.

LUCIENNE. I ask your forgiveness.

BERTRY. If you want me to forgive you absolutely you will make up with Jean.

LUCIENNE. That is not possible. Jean said so himself. There are certain powers against which one cannot struggle.

BERTRY. But I know you so well, I know what you really are; you can triumph over yourself, Lucienne.

LUCIENNE. No. I have read too many of Dr. Bertry's books and I have listened to him too often not to know what to expect. I am a scholar, you see! And besides. I truly believe that I never loved any one but Paul de Maucour. It was he whom I should have married.

BERTRY. What are you going to do?

LUCIENNE. I don't know.

BERTRY. What answer can I give Jean? Can I tell him that there is any hope?

LUCIENNE. If you want to.

BERTRY. But you love me, don't you?

[*Lucienne embraces him. He goes out — Lucienne is alone for a moment; then Paul enters*]

LUCIENNE. Here he is! This is the deciding point of my life.

PAUL. Well, you did not come this afternoon. Didn't you receive my letter?

LUCIENNE. Yes.

PAUL. Well?

LUCIENNE. Did you really think that I would come?

PAUL. Yes, because I believe that you love me.

LUCIENNE. You do?

PAUL. Well, don't you?

LUCIENNE. [*Softly*] Yes. [*Raising her voice*] Then it is understood that we love each other. Now speak. [*She sits down*]

PAUL. Ah, how sweet it sounds to have you say that at last! You see, it was decreed that you and I were made for each other, and nothing in the world could overcome that. Lucienne, you are the dearest, most enchanting creature! In spite of the fact that our union will not be blessed, this secret marriage, which we will freely contract, will be firmer and more delicious than any other.

[*He tries to grasp her hand*]

LUCIENNE. [*Drawing her hand away*] No.

PAUL. Why not?

LUCIENNE. And this dream — how are you going to realize it?

PAUL. What I should like to do, my darling, would be to carry you far away in my arms, far from all who know us, into a distant, unknown land, where I could give you my whole life in exchange for yours.

LUCIENNE. You would do that?

PAUL. I wish with all my soul that I could.

LUCIENNE. What keeps you from doing it?

PAUL. Just think, my dear, of the sorrow that we should leave in our wake. I am not talking of my relatives only, but of yours, of Alice, of your husband; I ask myself whether we have the right to create a happiness for ourselves built on the sorrows of so many people who have never caused us any unhappiness, and whom our flight would cause the most acute anguish.

LUCIENNE. Then?

PAUL. Don't you think I am right?

LUCIENNE. Yes, yes.

PAUL. Oh, it is costing me enough! to renounce this perfect happiness, this absolute abandon — alas, impossible!

LUCIENNE. Impossible!

PAUL. I have thought of other things. This is what I have planned.

LUCIENNE. Ah, let me hear!

PAUL. We will get a little place in some quiet part of Paris, a little nest lost among the foliage and the flowers. That will be our home. We will meet there as often as we can. And this wonderful mystery of ours will be one of the sources of our joy. We alone shall know that we love each other. [*Lucienne*

rises] Won't we be supremely happy, Lucienne?

LUCIENNE. Perhaps. Have you thought of the constant lies that we shall have to tell?

PAUL. [*Standing*] Of course, and I regret it as much as you do.

LUCIENNE. But it will be nothing; probably everything will go well.

PAUL. Why yes.

LUCIENNE. In order to meet we shall have to write. And isn't that rather dangerous? Our absences will be noticed; we shall be followed.

PAUL. Of course as things stand with Jean now our situation is more precarious than it would be ordinarily.

LUCIENNE. What do you mean?

PAUL. If he were not suspicious of me now; if —

LUCIENNE. If?

PAUL. If only you were on apparently good terms with him. We should have a hundred opportunities to meet.

LUCIENNE. But the situation is not like that now.

PAUL. There would be a way — only —

LUCIENNE. Oh, come now, my friend. What is keeping you back?

PAUL. I tell you in advance it will cost me a lot — a lot — but —

LUCIENNE. But love excuses everything.

PAUL. [*Approaching her*] Yes, doesn't it? Well, this is what I thought. If we could both make up with Jean we should at least be in a normal situation.

LUCIENNE. "Normal situation" is charming.

PAUL. [*Flattered*] You are too good. But doesn't that plan suit you?

LUCIENNE. I must confess that at first I was a bit shocked.

PAUL. Very well, I will think about it, I will find something else. The main thing now is that we are sure of our love for each other. For you love me, don't you?

LUCIENNE. Can you doubt it after what we have just said to one another?

PAUL. Let me look into your eyes — [*She rises, and he holds her*] You have never been so beautiful. [*Very softly, and putting his arm around her waist*] You will be the most adorable mistress. [*Lucienne looks at him for a long time*]

LUCIENNE. Coward! You are a coward, I say! In the end, all of this hurts me, revolts me, and I cannot contain myself any longer. [*Becoming very excited*] Ah, what things, what ignoble things you have dared to propose to

me! I am to become reconciled with Jean, you will be reconciled with him, your friend, and steal his wife away from him. That was what you desired! Adultery may perhaps be excused when it binds two people until death, but you do not desire that kind. What you desired was banal intrigue, with all of its lies and hypocrisies. But you will have to search for that elsewhere. In vain I have striven with all of my strength, but I cannot — I cannot play that role! I have tried — yes. On receipt of your letter, I went to your *rendez-vous* — I arrived in front of the house in which you were waiting for me, and all of a sudden I had a clear and complete vision of the abjection into which I was about to throw myself. I got into the carriage that had brought me, I came back here, and, thank God, if I was aware of the degradation of lying before my departure, I am at least ignorant of the shame of the return.

PAUL. Then you do not love me?

LUCIENNE. It is evident that I do not, since you have made my whole being revolt as from a sort of contamination.

PAUL. And you do not believe in my love for you?

LUCIENNE. Your love! It disgusts me! It disgusts me! Your love produces nothing but

lies, cowardliness, filth! I recognize that kind of love: it is the sort of homage which others have insulted me with for a long time now. I have seen it often, too often, thanks to the promiscuity of the balls, shining in men's eyes, and it is the same I have just seen glittering in your eyes.

PAUL. [*Animated, going towards her*] Lucienne!

LUCIENNE. Yes, it is the same, for you are like all the others; it is always the same contracted mouth, the same trembling hands, the same gentle hypocrisy, the same bestial and insulting desires! Ah, if every woman, if every young girl even, would dare to tell of the ignominies to which men have attempted to subject her, if she would dare to repeat the inexpressible propositions made to her by young men, old men, men who are reputed to be virtuous and faithful! And all of this is done within two feet of the husband or father, whose hands they are going to shake when they leave, after their plans have been checked! Ah, what cowards you all are! And what audacity you need to dare to exalt this love which you have so debased! Now go, will you? Go!

PAUL [*Approaching her*] No. [*A pause*] If your friends, Madame de Cattenières and Madame Longuyon were to hear you they would never recognize their recent laughing

companion — Lucienne. [*He steps up to her*]

LUCIENNE. Leave me!

PAUL. No!

LUCIENNE. [*Cries out, as she is being followed around the room by Paul*] Jean!

PAUL. [*Trying to put his hand on her mouth; very gravely*] I love you.

LUCIENNE. Jean!

PAUL. You have played with me, that's enough.

LUCIENNE. JEAN!

[*Jean appears. Lucienne utters a cry of triumph and throws herself into his arms*]

JEAN. Lucienne!

LUCIENNE. Protect me, Jean, protect me! [*A pause*]

PAUL. I am at your service, sir.

[*Jean holds Lucienne in his arms. He hides his great inner joy. He replies to Paul in a scornfully smiling manner. Softly*]

JEAN. Go — that is all — I do not hate you. My wife told you to go — so go — that is all I ask of you. Go!

PAUL. But —

JEAN. Go!

[*Paul goes out*]

JEAN. [*Still holding Lucienne in his arms*] My dear Lucienne.

LUCIENNE. [*To herself, after drawing a little*

away] Ah! — am I a good woman just the same?

JEAN. Lucienne! My wife! Do you love me?

LUCIENNE. I do not doubt myself any longer. But what they said, Jean. And their science?

[*Voices are heard in front of the door*]

JEAN. Science. But what is the matter?

LUCIENNE. Yes, what is it?

[*The door opens*]

BERTRY. [*Still outside*] This way. Lift the tapestry. Hurry!

[*Bertry and a servant enter supporting the doctor between them. The doctor is very pale and can hardly walk*]

LUCIENNE. Uncle!

BERTRY. [*To Jean*] The armchair — that's it. [*To the servant*] Lower the portières, and then you may go.

THE DOCTOR. [*To the servant as he is going out*] Wait. Say — say that it is nothing.

[*The servant leaves*]

LUCIENNE. Send for some help.

THE DOCTOR. No, no! And above all, let no one hear of this! All I need is a bit of fresh air!

[*He opens his vest. Braces are visible. Lucienne, at his right, tries to undo his necktie, but*

she does not do it quickly enough; the doctor takes his collar with his left hand and tears it off. To his brother] Tell me — did any one see me?

BERTRY. No.

THE DOCTOR. How did it happen?

BERTRY. You left the salon. You were alone with me. Suddenly, you turned frightfully pale — and held on to me to keep from falling. Then you said: "Like the other one — suddenly — like the other one, André!" You almost lost consciousness. I called a servant — we brought you here. And that is the whole story.

LUCIENNE. What can be done?

THE DOCTOR. What is there to be done? If I only knew, my dear child! [*Softly, almost with shame*] But I know nothing! All I can do is to wait for the next crisis, tomorrow, in a week — and so it will go on — until it carries me off some day. I have been suffering like this for years now, do you understand, for years!

LUCIENNE. Years?

THE DOCTOR. Yes, I hid it from everybody. I was ashamed of my pains which I could not relieve — I hid them — on account of the pride, you know, the pride of the scientist. Now you see my misery — you see nothing but a poor human rag before you — like the others, like all the

others, in that frightful distress at feeling one's life blood ebbing. Still I can try something just the same.

Perhaps others know — Richon — call Richon! Beg him to prepare something for me, to find — to invent. No! No! [*To himself*] Find, invent. Now I am as foolish as my patients! [*Grandly*] If I believed in God I would get on my knees and pray to Him for a miracle. [*He weeps. After a pause*] But I do not believe in Him! I do not even believe in science — and I have not believed in it for a long time now.

JEAN. [*To Lucienne*] You hear, Lucienne, you hear!

THE DOCTOR. [*Beating the arms of his armchair*] Science! science! science! — ah, ah! — One imagines a million things are the matter! — one wants to formulate laws of life — and is present, powerless, at one's own agony! We understand nothing that happens about us, we understand nothing that is happening within us. Why am I going to die? My arteries will begin to harden. Why? How? What is hardening of the arteries? Do you want me to tell you? We know nothing about it, nothing, nothing, nothing! — we have found nothing but words! [*A pause. The Doctor rises*] I'm better again. I'm quite relieved.

BERTRY. [*After a pause*] Look at these children. You failed to make them unhappy. Tell them that your statements were made at a venture; tell them that we all have energy in us to fight against hereditary blemishes, and that no one is born who is condemned in advance to utter despair.

LUCIENNE. [*Supplicating, with great emotion*] Yes! Yes! say that your distressing theories are vain; say it so that I shall feel myself delivered from the heavy fatality that seems to hang over me; so that I can feel free; say it, say it! so that I shall know that we are not dominated by the tyranny of the dead!

JEAN. Do not repeat your despairing maxims! I beg of you not to! I entreat you in the name of all the unfortunates upon whom weighs the restlessness of a doubtful heredity, and who, more than the others, have need of confidence and courage.

THE DOCTOR. [*After a long pause*] I have nothing to add to what you have just heard. My — pride failed to make you lose. I ask your forgiveness.

JEAN. [*To Lucienne*] We are free at last! Do you believe me? I love you! Do you believe me?

LUCIENNE. I love you and I believe you! I love you and I believe you! [*They embrace*]

La Belleuse. [*Appearing in the doorway*] Dear master, — they are all waiting for you to begin your lecture.

[*The doctor stands erect. He again takes on the air of the first act. A long pause, then pointing to his order of the commander*]

The Doctor. I'll put that on again — and I'll come at once. What was I going to say to them? [*As he goes he prepares the beginning of his speech*] Gentlemen and colleagues, the sovereignty of science.

CURTAIN.